WAITING FOR FIDEL

The Nation.

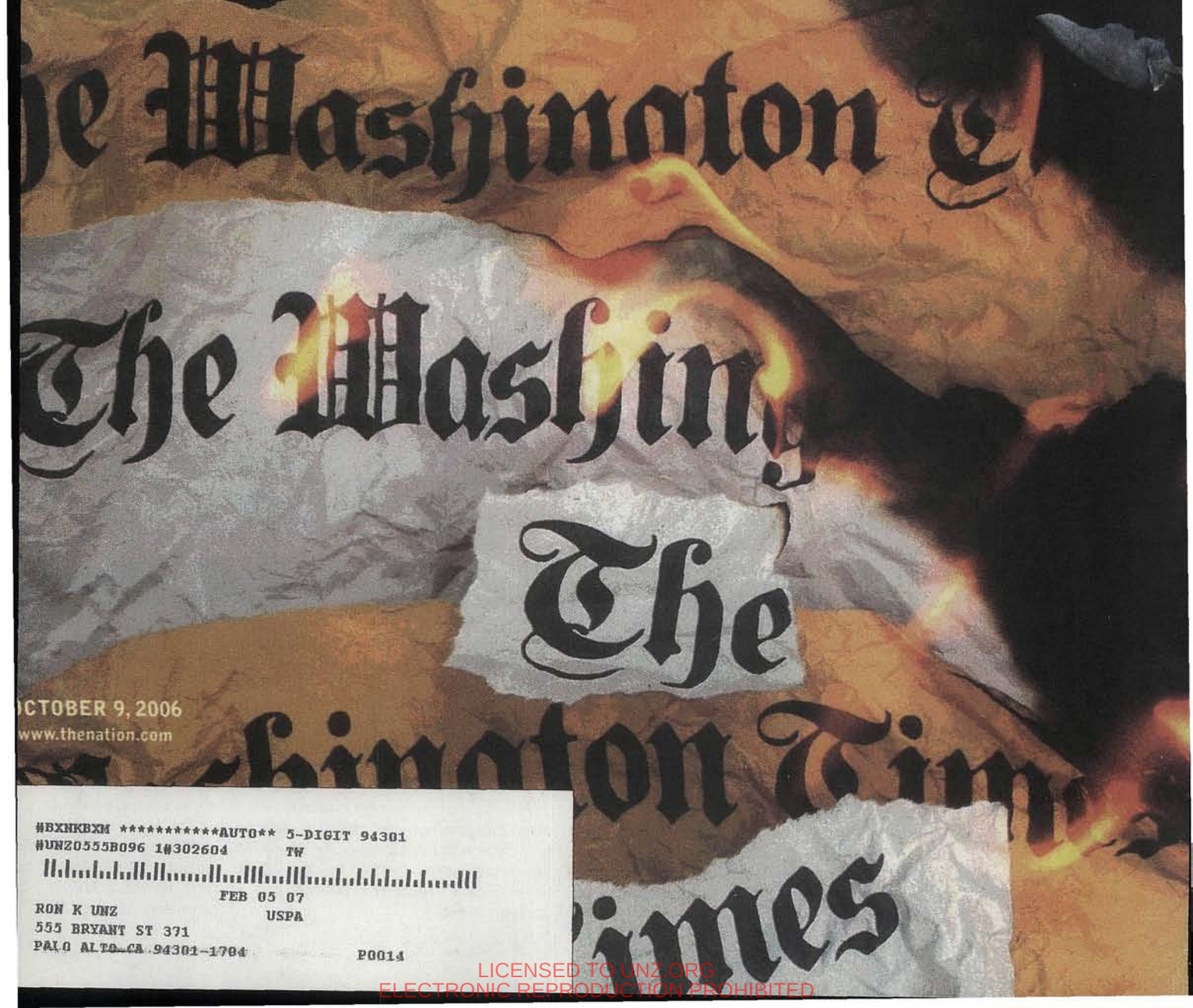
IRAN AND INTELLIGENCE
The Editors

WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH NARAL?
Katha Pollitt

BRAIN POWERS
William Deresiewicz

HELL OF A *TIMES*

SUCCESSION BATTLE RAGES IN RIGHT-WING MESSAGE FACTORY by MAX BLUMENTHAL



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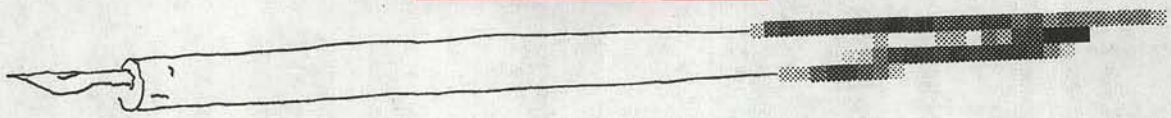

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

Jonathan Schell's "Too Late for Empire" drew much praise from readers [Aug. 14/21]. Schell was called "the finest analyst of US foreign policy writing today" and "a national treasure." The article was described as "scintillating," "insightful...bursting with relevancy and passion" and "a brilliant exposition of humans' predicament in global historical terms." —The Editors

EMPIRE BURLESQUE

Atlanta

■ "Too Late for Empire" was an excellent analysis of the limits of military power in the modern world. One point that was brushed against but not explicitly made is the sheer size of modern populations. When Alexander of Macedon (or "Alexander the Great") conquered the Babylonian Empire, the population of that region numbered in the tens of thousands. When George of Crawford (whom history will certainly never label "George the Great") attempted to conquer the same region in 2003, the population was 27 million. A population of millions cannot be ruled by military force, as we should have learned from Vietnam.

JEFF BRYAN

Providence

■ Exciting though it certainly is to ponder "the aroused will of local peoples everywhere who, collectively, had put an end to the age of imperialism," we need to give equal time to the modern capitalist phenomenon of a truly global marketplace for weapons. These armaments, available to insurrectionary movements as never before in human history, range from inexpensive handguns to the RPGs the CIA left behind in Afghanistan, and they insure that oppressive regimes in the twenty-first century will find it very difficult to say, as the British Raj could say in India: "We have got/the Maxim gun, and they have not."

MATTHEW EVERETT

Monument, Colo.

■ The revamped Strategic Command, and its newer component commands, like Space and Global Strike and Network Warfare, explicitly tout a global-domination philosophy that is far starker than the Joint Chiefs of Staff papers of the superpower era, or the Project for a New American Century think pieces written by neocons in the days prior to George W.'s assumption of power. StratCom, particularly since swallowing up US Space Command in 2002, has become the headquarters for the so-called "revolution in military affairs." StratCom has always been at the forefront of what Rumsfeld calls "transformational" strategy. It combines the nuclear domination policies of its predecessor, Strategic Air Command, with the desire to blur distinctions between nuclear and precision conventional weapons for regional tactical warfare, a policy borrowed from US Space Command. This does not negate Jonathan Schell's suggestion that our nation has neither the budget nor the will to mimic British or Ottoman empires of past centuries. But it's important to pay attention to the high-profile Pentagon commands that still push for world domination.

LORING WIRBEL

Kailua, Hawaii

■ One all-important detail should have been included in Jonathan Schell's comments about our "impotent omnipotence." Nuclear weapons have absolutely no military value. Many top military experts have stated this clearly (always after retirement). A major nuclear exchange involving even second-tier powers would have such immense catastrophic global consequences as to render the notion of victory a grotesque joke. Nuclear winter would be only one consequence of war between the big boys. The paranoids and criminals who devised "mutual assured destruction" during the cold war were, in a perverse sense, on to something. They just didn't know what it was. Judging from the vigor with which they hold on to absurd quantities of nuclear weapons, many on hair-trigger alert, neither do our leaders today (nor do the Russians).

WILLIS BUTLER, MD
Physicians for Social Responsibility/Hawaii

Mugla, Turkey

■ What about the military-industrial complex? Giving up "dreams of imperial grandeur" will lead to vast reduction in the necessity for arms and armaments. How will the arms lobby react? It seems to me that the enemy abroad and the enemy within are conceived, manufactured, to perpetuate the vast military-industrial complex, the giant with an insatiable appetite, the giant whose current serving boys, Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld et al., stand to gain. This giant is not likely to relinquish its power voluntarily. It will need a power far greater than Republicans or Democrats—the power of the American people, if only they can be woken up to break the stranglehold of undemocratic control. As Jonathan Schell states, "modern peoples have both the will and the capacity to reject imperial rule and assert control over their own destinies."

JANET SURMAN

New York City

■ Schell's analysis should be the blueprint for the Democratic Party's foreign policy platform. However, as a woman of color, I am curious about the absence of a discussion of race. Race plays a role in historical European-American imperialism and in the Bushites' and Israel's current ambitions. My sense is that overriding the machismo of empire is the "rightness of whiteness" and thereby the wrongness of all others. The genocide of Native Americans, for example, fits that mold. Race matters and cannot be divorced from America's imperialistic worldview and it's current policies.

SHERLETTA MCCASKILL

Santa Ana, Calif.

■ Jonathan Schell was so kind as to sign a copy of one of his books for me a few years ago. "Too Late for Empire" reinforces what he added to his signature that day. He appended "In Hope" to the inscription. As I read his signature tears come to my eyes. I am afraid to hope that this dark and dangerous passage of our nation could be led by diplomats who understand Schell's scholarship and grasp of history, with its lessons from our horrible misadventures. I will read his book again. I may find the hope that eludes me.

ALAN NESTLINGER

ELECTRIC KOOL-AID LITMUS TEST

Munich

■ The goofy and false cultural memory of the period loosely known as the sixties that Neal Pollack's generation cherishes informs his review of the Timothy Leary biography ["A Burnt-Out Case," Aug 14/21]. It has been for decades de rigueur to piss on the sixties, especially for hipper-than-thou perennial adolescents like Pollack. He would do well to read *Storming Heaven: LSD & the American Dream* by Jay Stevens and thereby get a clue.

JOHN BROWNER

University Place, Wash.

■ I stopped reading the latest hatchet job on Timothy Leary when I encountered this phrase: "...the most famous proponent of narcotics-fueled social change." Uh, narcotics? Let your reviewer go to any dictionary and look up "narcotic," then meditate—no need for drugs here—on its nonrelationship to LSD, peyote, psilocybin or any other substance promoted by Leary and his acolytes.

DANIEL RAPHAEL

Charlottesville, Va.

■ The counterculture, despite all its loopiness and blind spots, was, and is, more than its famous names. I suggest that Neal Pollack visit places like Athens County, Ohio, where low-impact communal living and alternative business creation have been the lasting products of the long, strange trip. The least-famous of the swirly, crystal-touting former trippers have been the most creative in actually countering the culture.

KENNETH HYMES

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EDITORIALS

Déjà Vu on Iran?

Here we go again. The clichés come frighteningly easy when one ponders the recent efforts of the hawks to gin up the case for military confrontation with Iran. The playbook is familiar: Pump up the threat, use the media as a conveyor and watch public opinion swing toward war.

A campaign of this sort has been under way for weeks. In late August the staff of the GOP-led House Intelligence Committee released a report on Iran that depicted it as a pressing strategic danger. Iran "probably" has a biological weapons program and "likely" has a chemical weapons research and development program, it said. More alarming, the report stated that Iran was definitely "seeking" nuclear weapons and enriching weapons-grade uranium. It conceded that US intelligence lacked crucial information on Iran's WMDs, but it warned intelligence analysts not to be wimps in reaching assessments about Iran's WMD capabilities and not to "shy away from provocative conclusions." That is, don't wait for hard-and-fast evidence before pronouncing Iran a nuclear threat.

The media coverage of the report was straightforward—a bit too straightforward. Major news stories did not question the report's assertion that Iran is producing weapons-grade uranium. Yet three weeks later, the International Atomic Energy Agency sent a letter to Peter Hoekstra, Republican chair of the House Intelligence Committee, criticizing the report for being "outrageous and dishonest." It noted that uranium for weapons must be 90 percent enriched but that Iran had enriched uranium only to 3.5 percent. The IAEA letter—first reported by the *Washington Post*—also challenged the committee's unsupported assertion that the IAEA has a policy barring its officials "from telling the whole truth about the Iranian nuclear program."

The report was born of an agenda: to whip up public support for military action against Iran. Its principal author was Frederick Fleitz, a former CIA official who had worked for hard-liner John Bolton at the State Department. The report was not fully vetted by the intelligence committee before being released by Hoekstra (who in June was claiming that there had been WMDs in Iraq), but it *was* reviewed by the office of John Negroponte, the hawkish Director of National Intelligence. Pardon our suspicion, but this whole deal appears to be an end run orchestrated by a Boltonite keen on clearing the way for military action.

The obvious question is, can they get away with it again? In this sequel the war advocates have another repressive regime to demonize and another proliferation challenge they can portray as a dire and immediate threat. Knight Ridder reports that CIA and Pentagon intelligence officials are concerned that the offices of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld are "receiving a stream of questionable information" on Iran from Iranian exiles (à la Ahmad Chalabi and the Iraqi National Congress). But the Knight Ridder report adds: As was not the case during the Iraq episode, "intelligence analysts and others are more forcefully challenging claims they believe to be false or questionable." And foreign policy "realists" and retired and currently serving members of the military are warning that with Iraq falling apart, confrontation with Iran is not feasible. At the same time, a European push is growing to drop the threat of sanctions against Iran in favor of negotiations.

That's good news. However, the House intelligence report shows that the hawkish clique is prepared to roll over analysts and experts who don't reach the desired conclusion. And such dissenters will not have the (aptly named) bully pulpit routinely available to George W. Bush.

Which brings us to the media and Congress. Each will have to be far more discriminating and diligent than it was the last time around. No automatic transmission belt. No rubber stamp. No forgetting.

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The Growing Wage Gap

Democratic squabbling is not confined these days to policies regarding torture, terrorism and the Iraq War. To the Republicans' delight, many Democrats, led by organizations like Third Way, which describes itself as a policy center to help progressives connect with moderates, are arguing that middle-class Americans have done just fine economically for a few decades. As one Third Way economist puts it, "What progressives generally say about the economy is unrelentingly pessimistic... [and] simply flat-out wrong." The Third Way and like-minded Democrats argue that the middle-class electorate will only be repelled this November by the pleas of some Democrats for more aggressive economic policies to aid the working and middle classes. Most Americans, they claim, are not experiencing the economic pressure progressives say they are, and want only modest new proposals for help.

Who is simply flat-out wrong? Large pockets of Americans have done poorly over the past thirty years. Typical black families earn only about 60 percent of what white families do, most of the gains of the last generation coming in the late 1990s. Women, whose wages have risen fairly consistently from low levels, still earn only 80 percent of what men do. The recent stagnation of wages may be most disturbing. Despite the nation's rapid economic growth in the past five years, a typical household's income is lower today than it was in 2000.

But the most serious victims of the economy of the past thirty-odd years have been men and high school graduates. The erosion of their economic prospects has been consistent and demoralizing. The median wage of all men, discounted for inflation ("real" median wages), remains lower today than it was in 1973. The median is the typical worker, right in the middle of the pack. This is bad enough. But the median male worker with only a high school diploma earns 14 percent less today, after deducting for inflation, than the median worker did in 1973.

The Third Way approach is that you'll be just fine if you go to college. But as the invaluable new edition of *The State of Working America* (Economic Policy Institute) points out, the real median wage for male college graduates is up only 12.8 percent over this period. This is a trivial gain over so long a period. Can Democrats maintain with a straight face that so slight a gain means median workers are doing well? Economic historians have shown that typical incomes grew three times as fast throughout America's industrial history, and still more rapidly in the golden age after World War II. And hours worked generally declined.

What apparently gives Third Way Democrats solace is that real median incomes for two-worker households are up about 20 percent since the late 1970s. But this, too, is a modest gain by historical standards, most of it achieved in the late 1990s. And it is largely the consequence of spouses working more hours.

If spouses hadn't worked more, incomes at the median would have been up only about 9 percent—again, a trivial gain. Median family income for households with one male worker did not rise at all in this period.

One common response to the disappointing gains—among

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Republicans and quite a few Democrats as well—is that the remarkable new products of recent decades compensate for stagnating wages. This is misleading and betrays a lack of historical perspective. Americans enjoyed comparably and arguably more remarkable new products for much of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth. There were the sewing machine, cheap textiles, the kerosene lamp, the bicycle, the telegraph, the steamship and the railroad of the nineteenth century, to name but a few. There were the car and revolutionary electric appliances like the refrigerator, washing machine, record player, telephone and radio in the 1920s and '30s. There was the television revolution in the 1950s and '60s, as well as air-conditioning, inexpensive plastic products of all kinds, jet travel, a government-funded national highway system that opened the suburbs to the budding middle class and, by the 1960s, a significantly expanded Social Security system and a new national healthcare system for the elderly known as Medicare.

In general, health outcomes improved more rapidly over the course of the twentieth century—with the new urban sanitation systems of the early part of the century, antibiotics and vaccines, and more access to treatment—than they do now, despite recent medical miracles.

But through these periods, as noted, real median incomes rose far more rapidly than they have for the past three decades. Thus, families could buy new products that soon became necessities for a middle-class life, such as the car and telephone; buy more of the products they wanted; keep up with the rising costs of most services; and even take the weekend off. This was the American dream.

The rapid rise in the cost of education, healthcare, drugs and other key products in recent decades has created additional problems for those whose incomes have risen only slightly. Many key services are simply out of reach. Many costs associated with education and healthcare, for example, are up by four to five times since the early 1980s, compared with a doubling of consumer prices in general.

If men and high school graduates were truly frustrated, why didn't they vote for the Democrats in droves? Analysts have concocted many explanations for this electoral mystery. The most direct may be not that most Americans had minimal financial difficulties but that enough of them were convinced by politicians, political scientists, economists and influential businessmen back in the inflationary 1970s and '80s that the principal source of their economic problems was big government, taxes and irresponsible social programs. Many Democrats all too readily fell into line.

But unfettered markets have failed to make good the promises of their advocates. Effective new government policies are now the only way to relieve workers' broad economic frustrations, rebuild their damaged confidence and improve their lifetime security. In the long run, the winning strategy for Democrats will be to restore confidence in government, not deny the true state of the economy.

JEFF MADRICK

Jeff Madrick, editor of Challenge, *is director of policy research at the New School's Schwartz Center for Economic Policy Analysis.*

Driving While Muslim

Dearborn, Michigan

Ali Houssaiky and Osama Abulhassan left their homes in this historic Muslim-American enclave as college students and came home as terrorists. On August 8 Houssaiky and Abulhassan drove to an Ohio Wal-Mart to buy hundreds of cheap cellphones, intending to sell them back to a distributor they knew to earn some extra cash for tuition. The Wal-Mart employee, fearing two young men of Arab heritage were terrorists, called police, who promptly apprehended Houssaiky and Abulhassan. Making matters worse, they were in Houssaiky's mother's car, which contained a manual outlining airline checkpoints, a necessity for her job at Royal Jordanian Airlines. To the police and the Washington County, Ohio, prosecutor, Houssaiky and Abulhassan were the sum of all fears: two young Arabs with airline manuals and hundreds of devices that could be used as bomb detonators.

Houssaiky and Abulhassan were quickly convicted in the press. "I went to our cell," Houssaiky remembers. "The inmates showed us on TV, there was a line going across the screen [saying], Is This an Act of Terrorism at Work?" Yet within a week of their arrest, it became clear to prosecutors that there was no evidence linking either student to terrorism. Returning home to Dearborn, Houssaiky and Abulhassan called a press conference to denounce the "paranoia and xenophobia that is gripping the country." To Houssaiky, the fact that he and his friend were cleared of all charges is no comfort. "The media made us into animals," he says. "This is going to stick to us the rest of our lives."

The persecution of Houssaiky and Abulhassan—two former high school football stars—underscores the sense of besiegement felt widely in this community of 35,000. Dearborn has been a magnet for Arab and Iranian immigrants for more than 100 years, and its streets and storefronts proudly display the signs of Middle Eastern–American culture: Mosques and community centers sit peacefully next to McDonald's and Burger King along Dearborn arteries like Schafer Road and Warren Avenue. Yet over the past few months, and particularly during the Lebanon war, the Justice Department and the FBI have increasingly put Dearborn under collective suspicion. Nearly thirty people in the Dearborn area have been indicted on often-flimsy charges related to terrorism in the past three years, and more than half of them have been accused in the past four months. Assistant US Attorney Kenneth Chadwell, who heads the Justice Department's efforts to investigate terrorism connections in Dearborn, told the *Chicago Tribune* in late July, "The question is: Are they loyal to the US or to this terrorist group Hezbollah?"

The answer Dearborn gives is that it's loyal to both, in much the same way that many American Jews are Americans first, with a sentimental attachment to Israel. There is no doubt that much of Dearborn's Muslim community, many of whom are Lebanese, Iraqi and Iranian Shiites, is sympathetic to Hezbollah, which the State Department designates as a terrorist organization. Some have gone beyond passive support. In March the US Attorney's office indicted eighteen men for funneling profits from a Dearborn-operated cigarette-smuggling ring to

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Hezbollah, two of whom have pleaded guilty.

But most community leaders consider support for Hezbollah a derivative of Lebanese and Shiite identity, indicating support for resistance to Israel, not for terrorism. "Certainly there were a number of individuals, especially over the thirty-three days of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, who spoke very much in support of [Hezbollah], but they weren't speaking in favor of the kidnapping of the two Israeli soldiers as much as they were speaking in favor of the sole institution there assisting the country during the invasion," says Noel Saleh, president of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services. "'Hezbollah' means in the West different things than it means in the East," adds Mohammed Elahi, the Iranian-born imam of Dearborn's Islamic House of Wisdom. "Muslims on the whole, especially Shiites, but even Sunnis, support the resistance in Lebanon." Indeed, on a recent visit to Dearborn only days after the cease-fire took effect, I saw the red, white and green Lebanese flag everywhere—on shop windows, residential flagpoles and bumper stickers—but the yellow flag of Hezbollah was nowhere to be found.

It's that constitutionally protected sympathy that Dearborn considers the reason for the Justice Department's increasing scrutiny of the town. Not one resident has been charged with attempting to commit an act of terrorism against the United States, and Dawud Walid of the local Council on American-Islamic Relations insists that local leaders frequently inform the community of alternative, non-Hezbollah-linked Lebanese charities for their donations. The US Attorney's office in Detroit declined comment for this story, and the Detroit FBI office referred questions to the Washington headquarters, which also declined to comment.

Perhaps the most painful aspect of the Justice Department campaign is the fact that before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, many of Dearborn's Shiites, and especially its Iraqi expatriates, gave the Bush Administration the benefit of the doubt. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz hosted an anti–Saddam Hussein rally in Dearborn that February, where hundreds feverishly chanted, "Saddam must go!" Bush himself delivered a speech in the town shortly after the fall of Baghdad. In both cases, the message the Administration wished to send was clear: The authentic Iraqi and Arab reaction would be enthusiasm for the US invasion.

Now that the Administration looks unfavorably on a different aspect of Shiite identity, many here feel betrayed. "We feel like we've been used," says Imam Husham al-Husainy of the Karbalaa Islamic Education Center, an Iraqi-American cleric who once led prowar rallies in Dearborn. "This turn of events, the very easy accusations of people, not to mention destroying their reputations, is very alarming," adds Maha Hussain, a University of Michigan oncologist who hosted Wolfowitz at the Dearborn rally. "The Iraqi community put its trust in the Administration at the intention level and the competence level. Only God knows what their intentions were, but in terms of competence, at every step, they made the wrong choice. Iraq is destroyed."

The destruction is hardly limited to Iraq. Chadwell's prosecutorial team may well uncover financial ties between Dearborn and Hezbollah, although most that have emerged to date are trivial. What the United States may lose in the process is something far more valuable to its counterterrorism efforts: a viable Muslim-American identity. Unlike the disaffected Muslim minorities in Europe, "Muslims are part of this society, and no American Muslim has been involved in any terrorist activity," observes Elahi. With Al Qaeda and other jihadist organizations increasingly reliant on radicalized Muslim minorities in the West to carry out attacks, an American Islam is as important as it is increasingly endangered.

"Sometimes it makes you schizophrenic," Saleh admits. "We want the community to trust the law enforcement agencies and provide information to law enforcement.... But the willingness of the community to trust the fairhandedness of the police is diminishing."

SPENCER ACKERMAN

Spencer Ackerman is an associate editor at The New Republic.

CALVIN TRILLIN

GEORGE W. BUSH AND SOME REPUBLICAN SENATORS DISCUSS THE GENEVA CONVENTIONS

My countrymen, Bush said, I've made it plain
That treaties can be treated with disdain.
Geneva is naïve, a bit arcane.
It should be changed in ways that I ordain.
Not so, said Warner, Graham and McCain.

We need some laws, my lawyers ascertain.
(This Constitution really is the bane
Of my existence, driving me insane.
It's I who should decide, like Charlemagne.)
Plus us, said Warner, Graham and McCain.

The evil terrorists whom we detain
Are questioned in a way I won't explain.
And only wussy traitors would refrain
From passing laws I've said we must obtain.
Plus us, said Warner, Graham and McCain.

Spanish Justice

Guatemala City and Madrid

As dusk approached and a light rain fell over Guatemala's Supreme Court plaza, Nobel Peace Prize recipient Rigoberta Menchú sought to buoy the spirits of the human rights activists, local clergy and Mayan women gathered there. "The Supreme Court hasn't given the green light on judging Ríos Montt yet," she said of the longstanding quest to bring the former

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dictator to trial. "But don't lose hope; we'll fight the rest of our lives to see there's full justice for the genocide in Guatemala."

These days, the justice Menchú hopes for is meted out, in large part, by the high courts of Spain. First they went after Augusto Pinochet, Chile's former despot. Then they trailed Adolfo Scilingo, the Argentine naval captain who had scores of political dissidents thrown from planes. Now Spain's National Court has a new target: former Guatemalan president Efraín Ríos Montt.

The pursuit of Ríos Montt, along with former president Oscar Mejia and other high officials, for the torture and assassination of roughly 200,000 Mayans during Guatemala's thirty-six-year civil war, makes Spain the world's foremost practitioner of universal jurisdiction—a principle approving prosecution beyond territorial boundaries in cases of especially egregious crimes. Other countries have invoked the principle, but since judge Baltasar Garzón ruled Pinochet eligible in 1998 to be tried in Spain for crimes against humanity, the country has taken the lead in prosecuting international human rights violations. "Spain was a pioneer in taking on two extremely important cases," says Alicia Gil, professor of international law in Madrid. "And once the process began, public opinion mobilized spectacularly behind it."

The Guatemala case dates to 1999, when victims including Menchú—whose mother and brother were tortured, and whose father was killed in a 1980 military attack on the Spanish embassy—filed claims in Spain against Ríos Montt and others for terrorism, genocide and torture. At the time, Spain confined its jurisdiction to cases involving Spanish nationals, allowing legal action on behalf of the Spaniards killed in the embassy raid but preventing it for the Mayans, who were the military's primary targets. In 2005, however, Spain broke new ground when its Constitutional Court ruled that claims could be prosecuted regardless of a victim's or perpetrator's nationality.

By June, Judge Santiago Pedraz was flying to Guatemala to take testimony from the accused. No sooner had he landed, though, than defense lawyers filed appeals that forced Guatemala's Constitutional Court to suspend hearings indefinitely—and set the solemn tone for the June 27 vigil where Menchú spoke. Upon his return to Spain, Pedraz issued an international arrest warrant for Ríos Montt and the others and froze their assets. Because the two countries have no extradition treaty, Guatemala's former president will not likely appear in a Spanish courtroom anytime soon. Nevertheless, the international search and capture order effectively prevents the accused from leaving Guatemala. "We're closing the cage," says Almudena Bernabeu, international attorney for San Francisco's Center for Justice and Accountability, which represents the victims.

Why has Spain become so ardent an advocate of universal jurisdiction? Garzón, never bashful about public attention, is partly responsible. But history and politics figure as well. Spain has focused on Latin American countries—former colonies where prosecutions can be seen, notes Bernabeu, "as an attempt to make amends." DePaul University law professor and International Human Rights Law Institute president Cherif Bassiouni dates Spain's interest in universal jurisdiction to the country's 1970s legal battles against the Basque separatist group ETA. "In order to prosecute ETA members hiding in France, Spain developed extraterritorial criminal jurisdiction. From there, it was easy to expand the concept."

Expand indeed. After Menchú's case was restored, Spain's Committee to Support Tibet (CAT) appealed its similarly rejected case against China—and won. Hence Judge Ismael Moreno's pursuit of former Chinese president Jiang Zemin and six fellow leaders for genocide against some 1 million Tibetans from the 1950s to the 1990s, and Spain's similar investigation of Jia Qinglin, former Secretary General of the Communist Party's Municipal Committee, for genocide and torture of the Falun Gong.

Predictably, affected countries have cried foul. China considers the investigation illegal interference and calls the charges "an absolute lie," while Ríos Montt's defenders have tarred Spain's inquiry as renewed imperialism. Even some legal scholars—including universal jurisdiction supporters—believe Spain has overreached. Gil faults classifying persecution for political beliefs (rather than for nationality, ethnicity or religion) as "genocide"—a characterization Spanish courts employed because the country's penal code did not acknowledge "crimes against humanity" until 2003.

For Bassiouni the problem is political. "We're talking about heads of state, senior government officials, who do bad things. Their counterparts would like to see them slapped but don't want to face similar scrutiny. Consider Bush and Cheney. They've authorized torture. Do you think they want to be investigated by Spain?" Bernabeu recognizes the problem. "The most important thing is to make a sustainable case," she says. "We may need to target cases a bit more carefully, aim at lower-ranking officers."

Universal jurisdiction's fate ultimately depends on whether it is enforceable. Scilingo languishes in prison, and in early September Chile's Supreme Court stripped Pinochet of his immunity and said he was fit to stand trial—a decision likely influenced by Spanish precedent. But if home countries won't cooperate, international investigations stall, and no one expects China—or Guatemala—to welcome prosecution or extradition. In fact, Interpol Guatemala recently responded to the Spanish arrest warrant with a statement asserting that Ríos Montt and the others have no criminal charges pending against them in the country.

Still, for human rights organizations, Spain's prosecutions are victories. Bernabeu, who expects to be in a Madrid courtroom with Guatemalan victims this fall, underscores these prosecutions' importance. The accused, she points out, "are now seen as criminals. In Guatemala it may be difficult to enforce, but that doesn't take away the symbolic importance for the community. This helps them heal their history."

GEOFF PINGREE AND LISA ABEND

Geoff Pingree and Lisa Abend are writers based in Madrid.

ON THE WEB: Salim Lone on the cease-fire between Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army. Dave Zirin on how an NBA star tried to do good by marketing a $14.95 athletic shoe to urban youths but ran afoul of the antisweatshop lobby. Jeffrey Chester on what the Internet will look like if Alaska Senator Ted Stevens succeeds in killing net neutrality (www.thenation.com).

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COMMENT

Rewriting the Sixties

As a co-founder of the Yippies (Youth International Party) with Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin in 1967, I observed how they were able to manipulate the media to further their antiwar mission. If you gave good quote, you got free publicity. Furthermore, in a tactic borrowed from the CIA, if you presented newsworthy street theater, the media manipulated itself. Fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your agenda, that kind of behavior has a way of backfiring. And so I was both amused and annoyed by an item by Dwight Garner in the August 13 *New York Times Book Review*. He wrote:

> Thomas Ricks, the senior Pentagon correspondent for The Washington Post, has a book on the hardcover nonfiction list this week... [Fiasco] got a boost from strong reviews and from appearances on both "The Charlie Rose Show" and NPR's "Fresh Air".... He filled the air with analogies that were funny, sad and apt.... George Bush and his team were like 60's radicals. ("They really were going to, kind of, 'groove on the rubble,' as Jerry Rubin used to say. They were going to tear it down and see what happened.")

Of course, glibness isn't necessarily a virtue. "Has it come to this?" asks Yippie archivist Samuel Leff. "With the Iraq War now an obvious catastrophe, Ricks is comparing the Bush gang's mindless destructiveness to sixties radicals like Rubin?"

Then, in the August 17 issue of the *Los Angeles Times*, linguist Geoffrey Nunberg wrote in an op-ed piece:

> In the mouths of the neocons, "fascist" is just an evocative label for people who are fanatical, intolerant and generally creepy. In fact, that was pretty much what the word stood for among the 1960s radicals, who used it as a one-size-fits-all epithet for the Nixon administration, American capitalism, the police, reserved concert seating and all other varieties of social control that disinclined them to work on Maggie's farm no more.... Time was when right-wingers called the ACLU a bunch of communist sympathizers. Now Bill O'Reilly labels the group and others as fascist, with a cavalier disregard for the word's meaning that would have done Jerry Rubin proud.

Leff comments that "if Nunberg had been thrown down the stairs, as Rubin was, by the New York City Tactical Police Force—a Waffen-SS–type goon squad of especially large men in uniform—who raided his apartment looking for drugs on secret orders from the FBI, Nunberg would have less 'cavalier disregard' for using Rubin's name in the same breath as the authoritarian fascist personality of Bill O'Reilly."

Finally, on August 20, Frank Rich wrote in his *New York Times* column:

> In 2006, the tired Rove strategy of equating any Democratic politician's opposition to the Iraq war with cut-and-run defeatism in the war on terror looks desperate.... A former Greenwich selectman like [Ned] Lamont isn't easily slimed as a reincarnation of Abbie Hoffman or an ally of Osama bin Laden.

Yeah, right. It was bad enough that a brainwashed American public would have even believed Bush Administration propaganda that Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden were married in Massachusetts and then adopted a Chinese baby. But Hoffman's worst caper was becoming a defendant in the Chicago Conspiracy Trial for what the official "Walker Report" described as "a police riot," while bin Laden was behind the 9/11 attacks. Now, however, in the guise of history, they've been paired. Abbie and Osama, together again.

I have not been immune to such incongruous couplings myself. The late Harry Reasoner, an ABC News anchor and *60 Minutes* correspondent, wrote in his memoir, *Before the Colors Fade*:

> I've only been aware of two figures in the news during my career with whom I would not have shaken hands if called to deal with them professionally. I suppose that what Thomas Jefferson called a decent respect for the opinion of mankind requires me to identify those two. They were Senator Joseph McCarthy and a man named Paul Krassner or something like that who published a magazine called *The Realist* in the 1960s...Krassner and his *Realist* were part of a '60s fad—publications attacking the values of the establishment—which produced some very good papers and some very bad ones. Krassner not only attacked establishment values; he attacked decency in general, notably with an alleged "lost chapter" from William Manchester's book, *The Death of a President*.

I appreciated Reasoner's unintentional irony—having started my career as a political satirist poking fun at McCarthyism—but I resented being associated with McCarthy. Whereas he had senatorial immunity for his libels, I risked lawsuits. What I really wanted to do was crash a party where Reasoner would be. "Excuse me, Mr. Reasoner," I would have said. "I just wanted to say how much I enjoy your work on *60 Minutes*." And then, as a photographer captured us shaking hands, I would add, "I'm glad to meet you. My name is Paul Krassner or something like that."

Decency is, of course, a subjective perception. And so arbitrary. In 1964 Lenny Bruce was found guilty of an "indecent performance" in Greenwich Village. In 2003 New York Governor George Pataki granted Bruce a posthumous pardon—but in the context of justifying the invasion of Iraq: "I hope this pardon serves as a reminder of the precious freedoms we are fighting to preserve as we continue to wage the war on terror."

When I told Abbie Hoffman that he was the first one who made me laugh since Lenny Bruce died, Hoffman said, "Really? He was my god." The combination of satirical irreverence and sense of justice that Bruce and Hoffman shared was the real spirit behind the Yippies, an organic coalition of stoned hippies and political activists who engaged in such symbolic actions as throwing money on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. So when journalists link the Yippies with misleading bedfellows, at best it's careless shorthand; at worst it's deliberate demonization. Osama bin Laden wanted an aircraft to crash into the Pentagon. Abbie Hoffman merely wanted to levitate it. PAUL KRASSNER

Paul Krassner, comedian and author, founded the countercultural journal The Realist *(1958–2001, RIP). His book* One Hand Jerking: Reports From an Investigative Satirist *is available, along with the Disneyland Memorial Orgy poster, at paulkrassner.com.*

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

From Flying Saucers to 9/11

The world is in tumult, but here in the heart of Empire the level of creative political energy runs flat along the bottom of the graph. As Iraq disintegrates amid frightful slaughter, US generals propose to bring to life the mad plan they ascribed to Saddam Hussein, to dig a defensive ditch round Baghdad, one of the larger cities on the planet. In Afghanistan the Taliban are once again on the rise. Amid these vivid implosions of the "war on terror," the US antiwar movement is near dead.

Here in the homeland, the mightiest names of the auto-industrial age have their backs to the wall. Tens of thousands of men and women face grim times as Ford and GM shutter plant after plant. Yet the pulse of organized labor amid this devastation is feeble. From the environmental movement there is an even fainter heartbeat, even as an actual conspiracy—official concealment of the toxic toll on New Yorkers from the 9/11 attack—finally comes to light. There's no convincing energy plan beyond posturing about ANWR; no protest at the giveaways of public lands.

Less than two months from the midterm elections, the Democrats cower from confrontation with a widely hated President. When Bush tries to annul America's always frail commitment to the Geneva Conventions on torture, Joe Biden complacently announces that the Democrats are happy to sit this one out and let Republican Senators McCain, Warner and Graham mount a counterattack. This is the way to rally millions of antiwar voters in November? Bush's present bounce in the polls shows the bankruptcy of Democratic strategy, as supervised by Rahm Emanuel.

Outrage burns in many an American breast, but there's scant outlet for it in the political arena. A friend of mine took his family to the annual Puyallup Fair near Tacoma, Washington. There was a CNN booth, in which a mini "Democracy Wall," an 8-by-4-foot sheet of butcher paper, was available for people to scrawl their sentiments in felt-tip. Fast as the CNN staffers changed the paper, scores more hastened forward to scribble their views, almost all of them harsh in language toward both CNN and the President. Families photographed each other in postures vulgarly disrespectful to the life-size cutout of Wolf Blitzer. When an older man—he turned out to be the retired commander of a nuclear submarine—rebuked the crowd and called for loyalty to Bush, the mood turned ugly, and for reasons of his personal safety he was advised to leave. "And yet," said my friend, the anthropologist David Price, "try getting these people to an antiwar rally."

It's as dismal a political landscape as I can remember in thirty years. Yet some discover a silver lining. They find it in the 9/11 conspiracy cult, which I discussed here a couple of weeks ago. A politically sophisticated leftist in Washington, DC, wrote to thank me for my attack, but added, "To me the most interesting thing (in the US) is how many people are willing to believe that Bush either masterminded it [the 9/11 attacks] or knew in advance and let it happen. If that number or anything close to that is true, that's a huge base of people that are more than deeply cynical about their elected officials. That would be the real news story that the media is missing, and it's a big one."

"I'm not sure I see the silver lining about cynicism re government," I answered. "People used to say the same thing about the JFK conspiracy buffs and disbelief in the Warren Commission. Actually, it seems to demobilize people from useful political activity. I think the nuttishness stems from despair and political infantilism. There's no worthwhile energy to transfer from such kookery. It's like saying some lunatic shouting to himself on a street corner has the capacity to be a great orator. The nearest thing to it all is the Flying Saucer craze. 'Open up the USAF archives!' It's a Jungian thing."

The 9/11-ers, who've insulted me and other radical critics for years as "gatekeepers for the neocons," "CIA agents" and "fearful for their jobs," are wounded when I call them nuts. I've had many e-mails repeating their delirious litanies about NORAD, the collapse of the WTC buildings or the "missile" that really struck the Pentagon. On this last matter, Chuck Spinney, now retired after years of brilliant public service exposing the Pentagon's budgetary outrages, wrote to me that "there ARE pictures taken of plane hitting Pentagon—they were taken by the surveillance cameras at Pentagon's heliport, which was right next to impact point. I have seen them...both stills and moving pictures. I just missed seeing it personally, but the driver of the van I just got out of in South Parking saw it so closely that he could see the terrified faces of passengers in windows. I knew two people who were on the plane. One was ID'd by dental remains found in the Pentagon."

This won't faze the nuts. They're immune to any reality check. Spinney worked for the government... They switched the dental records... The Boeing 757 was flown to Nebraska for a rendezvous with President Bush, who shot the passengers, burned the bodies on the tarmac and gave Spinney's friend's teeth to Dick Cheney to drop through a hole in his trousers amid the debris in the Pentagon, the same way the paleontologists did in the Sussex gravel pit when they faked Piltdown Man. Such fantasists are not the foot soldiers of any movement for constructive social change.

Richard Aldrich's book on British intelligence, *The Hidden Hand* (2002), describes how a report for the Pentagon on declassification recommended that "interesting declassified material" such as information about the JFK assassination "could be released and even posted on the Internet, as a 'diversion,'" and used to "reduce the unrestrained public appetite for 'secrets' by providing good faith distraction material." Aldrich adds, "If investigative journalists and contemporary historians were absorbed with the vexatious, but rather tired, debates over the grassy knoll, they would not be busy probing into areas where they were unwelcome."

By the same token, I'm sure that the Bush gang, and all the conspirators of capital, are delighted at the obsessions of the 9/11 cultists. It's a distraction from the 1,001 real plots of capitalism that demand exposure and political challenge. ■

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KATHA POLLITT

Single-Issue Solipsism

I'm writing this column in Clinton, Connecticut, where I live part of the year and hope to vote in November. I'm abandoning the antiquated voting booths of New York City because I want to do my bit to help the Democrats take back the House and Senate. Connecticut is a major battleground. Democratic Senate candidate Ned Lamont gets most of the press attention, thanks to his surprise upset of Joe Lieberman, now running on the Egomania ticket, but for the balance of power in Congress the House races are the ones that count: If Joe Courtney beats Rob Simmons, and Diane Farrell beats Chris Shays, and Chris Murphy beats Nancy Johnson, little Connecticut will give the Dems three of the fifteen seats they need to take back the House. That's quite an opportunity! Or maybe not: NARAL ProChoice America wants Nutmeg Staters to vote for Lieberman, and for Republicans Simmons and Johnson. (They haven't made up their minds about Shays, who blotted his prochoice copybook in 2003 by voting to ban so-called "partial birth" abortion.) Just north, in Rhode Island, they're supporting Lincoln Chafee for the Senate against his Democratic challenger Sheldon Whitehouse. All these contests are close. NARAL's money, volunteers and stamp of approval could make a difference—perhaps even *the* difference.

With all due respect to NARAL, an organization I've supported faithfully for years, Are they out of their minds? "We're not a partisan organization," NARAL president Nancy Keenan told me when we spoke by phone. "Party politics are not where we get involved." But for the prochoice agenda to have a shot, Congress must change hands. It's that simple. The dwindling number of prochoice Republicans are the party's useful idiots, permitted to cast futile votes against the "partial birth" abortion ban or right-wing Supreme Court nominees like Samuel Alito and John Roberts, or in favor of federal funding for birth control and sex ed (while casting hundreds of other votes along party lines) because their function is to hold on to seats a more reactionary candidate—an antichoice hard-liner, say—couldn't win. That's why in the Rhode Island primary Bush campaigned for Chafee, who didn't even vote for him in 2004, instead of Chafee's challenger in the primary, Steve Laffey, whose antichoice and right-wing positions would have handed the election to the Democrats.

The Republican Party can do the math. Why can't NARAL? Actually, it can. Take a look at "Why We Need to Take Back Congress" on NARAL's website (www.prochoiceamerica.org):

> In the last 10 years, Congress has voted 147 times to restrict reproductive-health services, including abortion and birth control. This November, we have an opportunity to stop these attacks on choice by electing six more pro-choice senators and 15 new House members. Need help imagining what a prochoice Congress would look like? Here are some examples of how Congress would shift in pro-choice hands:
>
> • Pro-choice lawmakers would control key committees, and pro-choice lawmakers would instantly become a majority on every panel.
>
> • Rather than sitting through anti-choice hearing after hearing, called by anti-choice committee chairs, new committee chairs could spend their time promoting women's health.
>
> ° Anti-choice lawmakers would no longer have a forum to spread propaganda on the "myths and effects" of Roe v. Wade, nonexistent syndromes like "post-abortion trauma," or allegations that RU 486 is dangerous for women.
>
> ° Pro-choice lawmakers could hold hearings to investigate the FDA's refusal to approve emergency contraception over the counter, the devastating effects of the global gag rule on women's health, and pro-choice measures that could reduce America's staggeringly high rate of teen pregnancy.
>
> • Pro-choice forces would control the Senate and House floor schedules. This means that we could avoid anti-choice legislative attacks—and instead, see votes on pro-choice bills that have been held up.

Six and fifteen, the magic numbers. Obviously, "prochoice" and "antichoice" are fig leaves here; these changes will take place when Democrats, not "prochoicers," become the majority party. When I asked NARAL political director Beth Schipp about this, she repeated that NARAL was a bipartisan organization. "We need support in both parties. I can take out a fully antichoice incumbent, so why would I turn my back on my friends?" Well, maybe because the friends, unfortunately, stand in the way of that larger goal, the six and fifteen, without which reproductive rights will continue their slow death by strangulation at the hands of the party in power.

I'm singling out NARAL here, but the same argument applies to other progressive single-issue groups that support Republican incumbents. The theory is, you need supporters in both parties, and if you're not loyal to incumbents who support your cause, you lose your leverage. That rationale explains why in 1998 the gay rights organization Human Rights Campaign supported the sleazy antichoice conservative Republican Senator Alfonse D'Amato against his Democratic opponent Chuck Schumer. In 2004, in return for his role in raising the minimum wage in New York State, the Working Families Party supported Nick Spano, longtime Republican state senator from Westchester, against his Democratic challenger, Andrea Stewart-Cousins, a progressive black woman. She lost by eighteen votes. Eighteen votes! Thanks, WFP, for shoring up the GOP majority in the New York State Senate.

Stories like these are the reason I prefer to support individual candidates. They may betray you and break your heart, but at least you are not canceling your own vote, and funding your own funeral. ■

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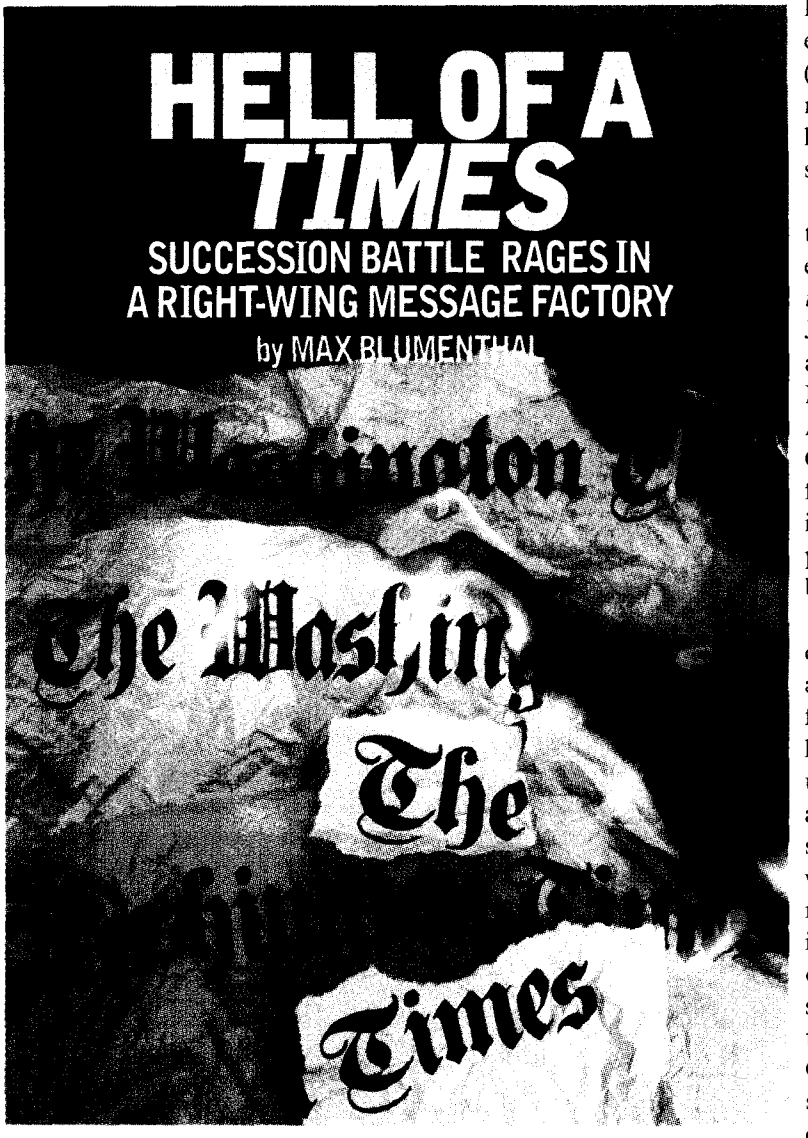
ARTICLES

HELL OF A TIMES

SUCCESSION BATTLE RAGES IN A RIGHT-WING MESSAGE FACTORY

by MAX BLUMENTHAL



These are edgy times at the *Washington Times*.

Still one of the most important right-wing organs in the nation, the paper has a circulation base of around 100,000. According to a source close to senior management, in the past two decades it has burned through far more than the $1.7 billion previously reported. During that time its editorial stance has consistently leaned to the hard right, as its favorite targets have ranged from liberal comsymps to President Bill Clinton to, most recently, "illegal aliens" and their allies in the "open borders lobby." Throughout, the *Times* has served as a major key on the conservative movement's Mighty Wurlitzer.

A nasty succession battle is now heating up at the paper, punctuated by allegations of racism, sexism and unprofessional conduct, that has implications far beyond its fractious newsroom. According to several reliable inside sources, Preston Moon, the youngest son of Korean Unification Church leader and *Times* financier Sun Myung Moon, has initiated a search committee to find a replacement for editor in chief Wesley Pruden—a replacement who is not Pruden's handpicked successor, managing editor Francis Coombs.

Preston Moon wants to wrest control of the paper from Pruden and Coombs, according to a *Times* senior staffer, in order to shift the paper away from their brand of conservatism, which is characterized by extreme racial animus and connections to nativist and neo-Confederate organizations. A Harvard MBA, Preston Moon is said to be seeking to install an editorial regime with more widely palatable politics. His search committee is reportedly headed by *Times* editor at large Arnaud De Borchgrave, the former editor in chief of UPI who edited the *Times* from 1985 to 1991. Once an ardent anticommunist who oversaw a *Times* fund for the Nicaraguan *contras*, De Borchgrave has been critical of the Bush Administration's unilateralist approach to foreign policy. According to a senior staffer and a source close to *Times* senior management, De Borchgrave favors UPI's editor emeritus Martin Walker as Pruden's successor. Walker is a former correspondent for the liberal British newspaper the *Guardian* and has been a vocal supporter of British Prime Minister Tony Blair's early New Labour politics. (De Borchgrave declined to respond to questions about his alleged role in the *Times* succession battle.)

Also rumored to be on the short list: Former UPI executive editor and *National Review* editor at large John O'Sullivan, a former adviser to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. A *Times* senior staffer says O'Sullivan met with his former boss in Washington in mid-September, where she pledged to throw her weight behind his candidacy.

Both Coombs and Pruden, meanwhile, are facing a litany of complaints from former and current colleagues of racism and sexual harassment. More than a dozen well-placed sources spoke to *The Nation*. Many wished to remain anonymous, for fear of jeopardizing their jobs. Others spoke on the record. But the sources are consistent about the atmosphere Pruden and Coombs have fostered inside the paper, which they describe as profoundly demeaning and abusive to women and minorities. Preston Moon has hired the powerhouse Washington law firm Nixon Peabody to interview *Times* staffers about the allegations of racism and sexism.

Approaching his seventieth birthday, Pruden is described by several sources as an "absentee landlord" who has tacitly handed control over to Coombs. Now Coombs is driving the paper to the far shores of the right. Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Project executive director Mark Potok credits the *Times* with helping to fuel the nativism that has taken hold this year in Republican political campaigns. "The *Times* is a terrible little newspaper that unfortunately has vastly disproportionate influence on the right wing of the Republican Party," Potok said. "The vast majority of people who read it don't realize that this paper is in bed with bigots and white supremacists. The *Times* is a key part of the radical right's apparatus in the United States."

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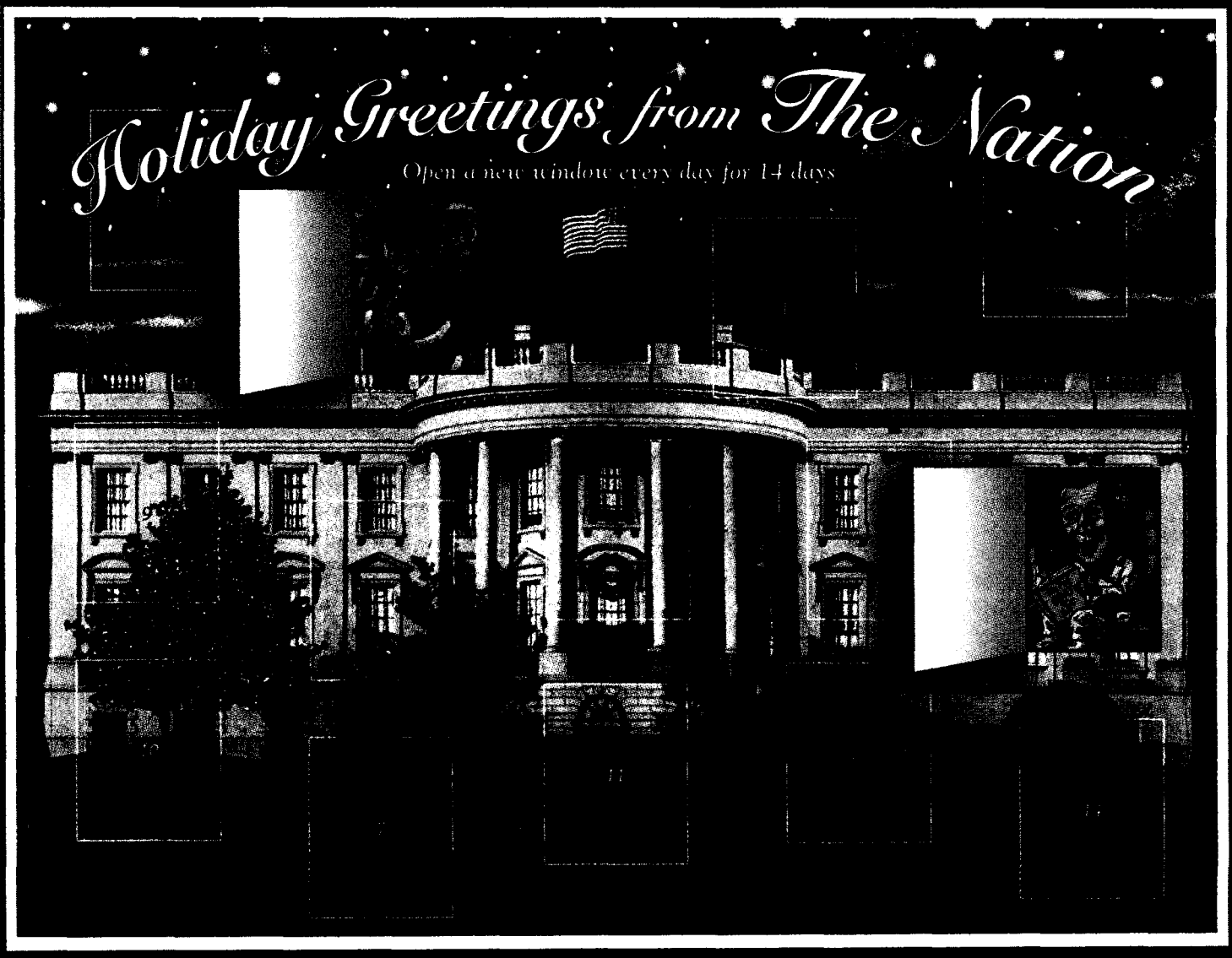

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Pruden and Coombs have stonewalled Preston Moon's investigation and threatened to hold a public news conference, during which they would denounce "the crazy Moonies" and claim that Preston Moon and his father are pressuring them to inject pro–Unification Church propaganda into the paper's coverage, according to a senior newsroom staffer. *Times* president Douglas D.M. Joo is backing Coombs and Pruden to the bitter end. Joo is a business rival of Preston Moon who, the senior staffer says, would be stripped of his post at the *Times* and redeployed to Korea if Pruden and Coombs go down. "This is a cancer that goes all the way to the top," the senior staffer said of the paper's tolerance of bigotry. "And if you don't root out the cancer, it will kill you. If this ever got out to the mainstream press, we would be finished as a paper."

Since its founding in 1982 by eccentric cult leader and self-proclaimed Messiah Sun Myung Moon, the *Times* has been a favorite outlet for the right. President Ronald Reagan granted *Times* reporters special access to the White House, and he publicly called it his favorite paper—pointedly not the *Washington Post*. During the Clinton era, the *Times* helped push media coverage of Ken Starr's ultimately fruitless Whitewater land-deal investigation. It has long served as a nest for fledgling conservative talent like its former editorial page editor Tony Snow, now White House press secretary and a key link between the paper and the Bush Administration. *National Review*'s O'Sullivan told *The Nation*, "The *Times* is an extremely important paper for conservatives because it's in Washington and it has great influence with the Administration."

Sources consistently describe the atmosphere at the paper as profoundly demeaning and abusive to women and minorities.

In January 2005 Bush hosted Coombs, Pruden and a handful of *Times* principals for an exclusive interview and tour of the Oval Office. Two months later Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was queried about her presidential ambitions by Pruden, Coombs and several *Times* reporters at the paper's offices. (Among Rice's revelations was that "shopping is fun.")

But even as it has enjoyed cozy relations with Washington politicos, from its earliest days the *Times* has been a hothouse for hard-line racialists and neo-Confederates. Pruden, who started at the paper in 1982, was their wizard. His father, the Rev. Wesley Pruden Sr., was a Baptist minister who served as chaplain to the Capital Citizens Council in Little Rock, Arkansas, the leading segregationist group in town. When President Dwight Eisenhower sent Army troops to protect nine black teenagers integrating Little Rock's Central High School in 1957, Pruden Sr. reportedly told an assembled mob, "That's what we've got to fight! Niggers, Communists and cops!"

In 1993 Pruden gave an interview to the now-defunct neo-Confederate magazine *Southern Partisan*, which routinely published proslavery apologias and attacks on Abraham Lincoln. Pruden boasted, "Every year I make sure that we have a story in the paper about any observance of Robert E. Lee's birthday.... And the fact that it falls around Martin Luther King's birthday."

"Makes it all the better," interjected a *Partisan* editor.

"I make sure we have a story. Oh, yes," said Pruden.

George Archibald, a former correspondent nominated for four Pulitzers during his twenty-three years at the *Times*, told me that when Pruden assigned him to travel to Arkansas in 1992 to dig for damaging information on Bill Clinton, a man named "Justice" Jim Johnson was the first source Pruden instructed him to meet. Johnson was a leader of the Capital Citizens Council chapter that Pruden's father belonged to. (In 1995 Pruden published two anti-Clinton op-ed articles by Johnson, who was later linked to right-wing billionaire financier Richard Mellon Scaife's Arkansas Project, a $2.4 million scheme in which "sources" were paid to help concoct anti-Clinton stories.)

When Coombs joined the *Times* in 1988, he became a charter member of Pruden's neo-Confederate cabal. Reared by a military family in rural Virginia, Coombs attended a private high school and William and Mary College, where he was known as a hard partyer with a vast collection of rock-and-roll records. After graduating Coombs cut his teeth at several Virginia papers and the States News Service. He pursued journalism as an extension of his family's military tradition. His motto, which he would recite time and again in the *Times* newsroom: "Journalism is war."

In his 1993 *Southern Partisan* interview, Pruden proudly recounted Coombs's speech that year at the Capitol hailing Confederate President Jefferson Davis. "I read the speech and it was quite good," Pruden told the *Partisan*. "I was originally asked to speak, but I was going to be out of town and Fran filled in for me. He was telling me what a thrilling thing it was to stand there and sing 'Dixie' in the statuary hall of the U.S. Capitol. I would have liked to have been there just for that."

While Coombs sympathized with Pruden's Lost Cause nostalgia, his politics were even harsher. "The thing about Wes is, he has other vices," said a *Times* senior staffer. "He loves a good meal, loves to have his ego stroked, he loves women, the social scene. As for bashing blacks and Hispanics, he shares Fran's views, but he has other preoccupations. Fran is the really hard-core ideological white supremacist."

Coombs believes immigration is "the number-one issue in America today," and he has played an instrumental role in pressing far-right positions into the mainstream. In a move that many sources considered emblematic, on August 22 Coombs splashed a favorable review of Pat Buchanan's book *State of Emergency* across the paper's front page. Buchanan's book is a diatribe calling for an immediate moratorium on all immigration, to stave off the demise of Western civilization. "There were a lot of other things going on [in the news] that day," a *Times* senior staffer said. "Any other paper would have reserved that for the book review section, but Coombs had to have Buchanan on the front page." Coombs, the staffer continued, "will literally stand there and scan websites and look for anything that's anti-Hispanic, that's immigrant-bashing, and he will order the editors to go with it." According to Archibald, in 2001 Pruden issued a memo instructing reporters to stop using the term "illegal

Max Blumenthal is a Puffin Foundation Writing Fellow at The Nation Institute. Additional reporting by George Zornick.

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immigrant" and instead use "illegal alien"—a lead the rest of the conservative media soon followed.

Coombs oversaw the *Times*'s coverage of the anti-immigrant Minutemen patrols along the US/Mexico border in 2005. A 2006 report by the ACLU, "Creating the Minutemen," singled out the *Times* for inflating the number of volunteers and overlooking the involvement of white supremacists in the Minutemen ranks. The *Times* correspondent tasked by Coombs with reporting on the patrols, Jerry Seper, was subsequently honored by an anti-immigration think tank, the Center for Immigration Studies, for his "dogged, committed" coverage. (Seper, for his part, is an ex-cop whose anti-immigration leanings are driven more by his close relationship with Border Patrol agents than by nativist ideology. He is described by a *Times* senior staffer as "disgusted" at Coombs's views on race and has been posited as a potential successor to Coombs as managing editor.)

In an interview, Coombs spoke proudly of his influence on the immigration debate. "Every article used to be about how the government abuses immigrants," Coombs told me. "Not one showed the negative impact of immigration. I don't want to suggest we led the way, but we were the first or one of the first to discuss immigration not from some feel-good perspective."

By soft-pedaling the ideology of racist groups, the Times *under Coombs has coated them in the balm of mainstream conservatism.*

Countering the "feel-good perspective" on race appears to be Coombs's passion. George Archibald told me that when he showed Coombs a photo of his nephew's African-American girlfriend, Coombs "went off like a rocket about interracial marriage and how terrible it was. He actually used the phrase 'the niggerfication of America.' He said, 'Not in my lifetime. If my daughter went out with a black, I would cut her throat.'"

Archibald recounted a discussion in 1992 among several *Times* reporters and editors: "We were having a conversation about abortion. We were all prolife, antiabortion, and we were trying to explain how we would discuss this in the paper. All of a sudden Fran blurts out that he is pro-abortion. I argued with him and he said, 'How do you think we're going to stop the population growth of the minorities and all the welfare people?'" Another *Times* senior staffer recounted similar statements about abortion and race by Coombs at a party, where Coombs called himself a "racial nationalist." A former staffer alleged that Coombs used racial slurs including "spic" and "towel-head" inside the *Times*.

Coombs told *The Nation* that while he favors abortion rights, "Anybody who told you that I support some kind of genocidal abortion policy is beyond deluded." When asked if he has ever used racial slurs, Coombs exploded: "Are you going to accuse me of being the twentieth Al Qaeda hijacker next? I mean, please. I find those terms to be beneath contempt. Do you truly believe that in a modern American newsroom a person could use phrases like that? That is beyond preposterous. That is just unbelievable. Anyone who says that is a complete liar."

But why were so many of his former and current colleagues leveling these allegations about him? Coombs could only speculate. "Maybe there's a chorus there," he said.

Inside the *Times* newsroom, Coombs has played a critical role in expanding Pruden's neo-Confederate cabal. For years, one of Coombs's closest friends at the paper was the late Samuel Francis, a right-wing intellectual who joined the *Times* as an editorial writer just as he plunged headfirst into white nationalism.

Pruden felt compelled to fire Francis in 1995 after conservative author Dinesh D'Souza reported on Francis's remarks at the American Renaissance conference, a gathering of academic racists, international neo-Fascists and neo-Nazis. (Francis said, "The civilization that we as whites created in Europe and America could not have developed apart from the genetic endowments of the creating people.") Recently Coombs praised Francis as "the voice of the Founding Fathers speaking down through the ages," on a website promoting a posthumous collection of Francis's writings called *Shots Fired*.

In 1997 Coombs and his wife organized a dinner for American Renaissance founder Jared Taylor, a man the SPLC describes as "a courtly presenter of ideas that most would describe as crudely white supremacist."

That same year Coombs recruited a reporter from a paper in rural Georgia, Robert Stacy McCain, to work at the *Times* as his national assistant editor. McCain belonged to the neo-Confederate hate group League of the South, which routinely promotes slavery apologias and favors a "second secession" of the South from the Union. By 2002 McCain had been promoted by Coombs to edit the *Times*'s Culture Briefs section. In short order, McCain turned that section into a bulletin board for the racialist far right. At Coombs's behest, McCain attended four American Renaissance conferences as a *Times* correspondent, only once reporting criticism of the group's white supremacist agenda.

By deliberately soft-pedaling the racial ideology of groups like American Renaissance and the Minutemen, the *Times* under Coombs has coated them in the balm of mainstream conservatism. True to form, Coombs defended McCain and American Renaissance against allegations of racial extremism. "My understanding," Coombs told me, "is there were some academics at the conference, people like Joe Sobran, and other people who don't fall into that [racist] category. So maybe there's some guilt by association." (Sobran is a right-wing columnist drummed out of his post at *National Review* for his anti-Semitism and Holocaust revisionism. The *Times* syndicated his columns until 1999.)

But McCain's views on race are well-known among his colleagues. In August 2002, according to Archibald, during a discussion in the newsroom about civil rights, McCain defended slavery as "good for the blacks and good for property owners." "We were just appalled," Archibald said. "He is just a complete animalistic racist." Describing Archibald's allegations as "bullshit," Coombs said McCain "has not made any comments in the newsroom like that, and if he had, there are African-Americans in the room who would kick his butt."

Marlene Johnson, the former *Times* arts section editor and an African-American, bristled at Coombs's remarks. "All African-Americans don't beat people up when they have a disagreement," Johnson told me. "That just shows what a racist Fran is. You had

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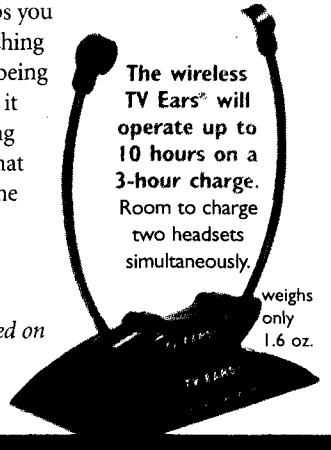

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a guy, Stacy McCain, who was an avowed segregationist, and Fran always overlooks that, he overlooks McCain's behavior." Johnson said that while at the *Times*, she was given an order from Pruden, delivered to her by Coombs, to stop doing "so many black stories."

Finally, this August, Coombs and Pruden placed McCain on administrative probation. Their reason, according to the *Times* senior staffer, was not McCain's racism but rather his anemic work ethic. When asked about his probation, McCain said, "I'm too lazy to be evil."

While McCain attended American Renaissance wearing his journalistic credentials, Coombs's wife, Marian Kester Coombs, told me she has gone to the conference to meet with old friends like Nick Griffin, leader of the whites-only British National Party (BNP). Indeed, she is more deeply embedded in the racist right than her husband is. A self-described former leftist who says she became "an extremist" after she "detoxed from the sixties," Marian Coombs portrays herself as a classic populist. "I would say in many ways I'm an unreconstructed Marxist," she told *The Nation*. "I basically am pro–working class and I think globalization and the policy of mass immigration is bad for the common man."

'[Coombs's] tactics toward women are to terrorize them and scream and intimidate. This guy was a sicko,' said one former staffer.

Asked whether her husband agrees with her politics, Marian Coombs said, "Pretty much," but claimed his personal views were not reflected in the pages of the *Times*. But she has contributed some thirty opinion pieces to the paper. In a November 2001 article she cited the BNP's Griffin, who was prosecuted twice in Britain for inciting racial hatred with his anti-Muslim rhetoric, as an expert on Muslim culture. Marian Coombs's byline has appeared in many of the far right's flagship publications, from *Chronicles* to *Vdare* to *The Occidental Quarterly*, which was edited by her friend Sam Francis until his death in 2005. And on American Renaissance's website, she posted this comment in 2001: "Whites do not like crowded societies, and Americans would not have to live in crowds if our government kept out Third-World invaders."

After ten years of publication, the *Times*'s leadership searched for a defining theme to replace anticommunism at the cold war's end. A new demon loomed on the horizon. Against the recently inaugurated Clinton Administration the *Times* took up the crusade for "family values." The paper's "family values" columnist, Suzanne Fields, dubbed Clinton "The Playboy President." Pruden, in two of his columns, accused Clinton of "oral adultery."

But all along, on Pruden's watch, Coombs was developing a troubling reputation in the newsroom for boorish behavior and misogyny. One senior staffer recalled Coombs saying, "Women are naturally inferior to men" and that women "tend to be dumber, more emotional and less dependable than men." One female former *Times* staffer described Coombs as hostile toward female employees. "I'm anything but a feminist. If anything, I'm against them. But it was illuminating—his tactics toward women are to terrorize them and scream and intimidate. This guy was a sicko."

In 2004 Coombs was accused of sexual harassment. The accusation stemmed from a series of incidents involving then–*Times* marketing consultant Melissa Hopkins during the Republican National Convention. In a letter written by her lawyer, Lynne Bernabei, that was delivered to then–*Times* senior counsel Allen Farber and made available to *The Nation*, Hopkins alleged that over cocktails one night at the convention Coombs grew belligerent and called her work "lame," and then suggested she go to his room for a "nightcap." When Hopkins refused, she claimed, the harassment increased. According to the letter, the next evening, while sharing a cab back to their hotel, Coombs pulled her toward him and attempted to kiss her. "Ms. Hopkins, who as Mr. Coombs is aware, is married and the mother of three children," the letter states, "resisted and tried to pull away, but Mr. Coombs succeeded in forcibly kissing her."

In her letter Hopkins said she complained to Pruden and *Times* vice president and general manager Dick Amberg. Pruden promised he would investigate the incident, but nothing happened. Amberg told her she was being "overly sensitive." And Hopkins claimed that Coombs, meanwhile, initiated a sabotage campaign against her, removing videos she had shot at the convention from the *Times* website, and "directed reporters and editors not to communicate with her." (Amberg, in an interview with *The Nation*, claimed that his "sensitive" remark referred to her reaction to the removal of the video, and had nothing to do with sexual harassment.)

Three weeks after Hopkins formally complained to the *Times*'s human resources department and a subsequent investigation by Farber, the paper's lawyer, went nowhere, she demanded a settlement, which Bernabei's letter made the case for. Instead, a year later, in October 2005, after the statute of limitations in which she could have filed a criminal complaint against Coombs expired, the *Times* terminated her contract without explanation. Archibald, a close friend of Hopkins, said, "Fran absolutely vilified Melissa [Hopkins]. She almost had a nervous breakdown."

"An allegation was made," Coombs explained to me. "It was independently investigated, numerous witnesses were called in. I had nothing to do with it, and an outside lawyer conducted an independent investigation and I was totally vindicated. She was told that and chose to pursue it no further." When confronted with specific allegations by Hopkins and questioned on whether the investigation was actually handled by an "outside lawyer" or by the *Times*'s own counsel, Coombs objected: "This town is full of major players who know me and know this stuff is bullshit. If I had that kind of behavior I would not be in this job." He went on: "I'm what they call a Southern gentleman. A Southern gentleman does not take advantage of ladies."

Through all these disturbing incidents, *Times* president Joo has stood by Pruden and Coombs. In June, according to a source close to senior management, Joo received a memo detailing specific charges of sexual harassment and racism against Coombs. According to the source, Joo dismissed the memo, telling *Times* owners from News World Communications, including Preston Moon, "I don't fucking care."

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Insiders say Joo's desire to inject himself into US negotiations with North Korea has been Pruden's ace card. Joo's interest in détente with North Korea is so profound that *Times* employees have nicknamed him "Kim Jong Il." According to a source close to *Times* senior management, Joo has taken numerous trips to the Hermit Kingdom to meet with the dictator Kim. He fancies himself a potential interlocutor between North Korea and the Bush White House. "What Wes does," Archibald explained, "any time any crisis happens, he just goes marching into Joo's office and he says, 'I can call George W. Bush up any time I want. You need me. I'm running this ship.' It isn't true that he can get Bush on the phone, but that's what he says."

One source close to senior management claimed Pruden has guaranteed Joo that he will deliver an appearance from President Bush at the *Times*'s twenty-fifth anniversary in 2007, and the source says Joo is bedazzled by Pruden's promise.

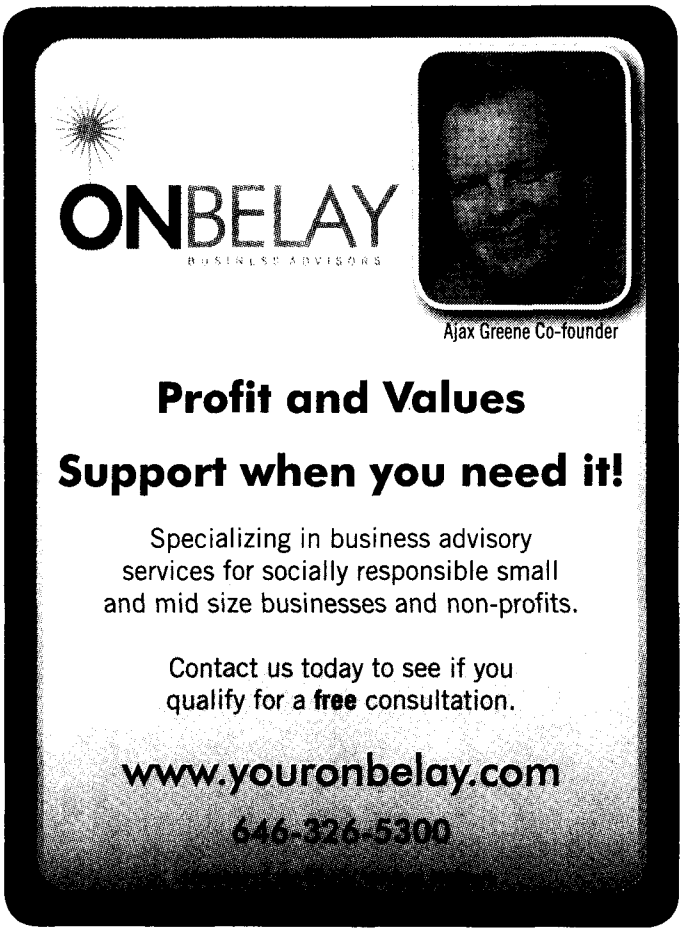
Pruden, for his part, sees Coombs's promotion as an extension of his legacy and a guarantee of his golden parachute. "Pruden will defend Coombs at any cost so he can walk out with a quarter-mil-plus comp package. He doesn't want anything to interfere with that, so he's defending his boy Fran," Archibald said, explaining that Coombs and Joo have promised Pruden a position as "editor emeritus" that will allow him to maintain his biweekly column and hefty paycheck.

Pruden, Coombs and Joo are now operating like a troika to eliminate threats, real and perceived, to their continued control over the *Times*. "This is everything to them," a senior staffer said. "And they will do anything they have to in order to survive. It's slash and burn." Pruden has enlisted the PR firm Hill and Knowlton to attempt to discredit media reports alleging racist and sexist behavior by him or Coombs.

Like cornered animals, Pruden and Coombs are growing increasingly aggressive in their tactics. Archibald said that the conservative magazine *Human Events* had planned to publish an article by him this September detailing instances of racism and sexism at the *Times* but that, under pressure from Pruden and Coombs, *Human Events* editor in chief Thomas Winter spiked the piece.

On September 6, the day before the story was killed, Marian Coombs sent Archibald an e-mail warning, "I've just seen what you're writing about the *Times*, my husband, Wes Pruden, and others.... Have you no shame? If you possess any residual genuine belief in God, you must also realize that such shameless, hate-filled behavior will harm your own soul terribly." Just how Marian Coombs obtained a copy of Archibald's draft from *Human Events* remains unclear. (Reached by phone, Winter immediately hung up when questioned about Archibald's piece.)

Coombs, according to a staffer, has called numerous *Times* reporters during the past few weeks to warn them that his departure could result in a new "left wing" editorship that will fire them en masse. But the sentiment may have already turned against them. "If Fran and Wes were to be replaced," the staffer said, "the newsroom would be like Rio if Brazil won the World Cup. The champagne would be popping like crazy." Many inside the newspaper already refer to Pruden's and Coombs's possible departure as "liberation day." ■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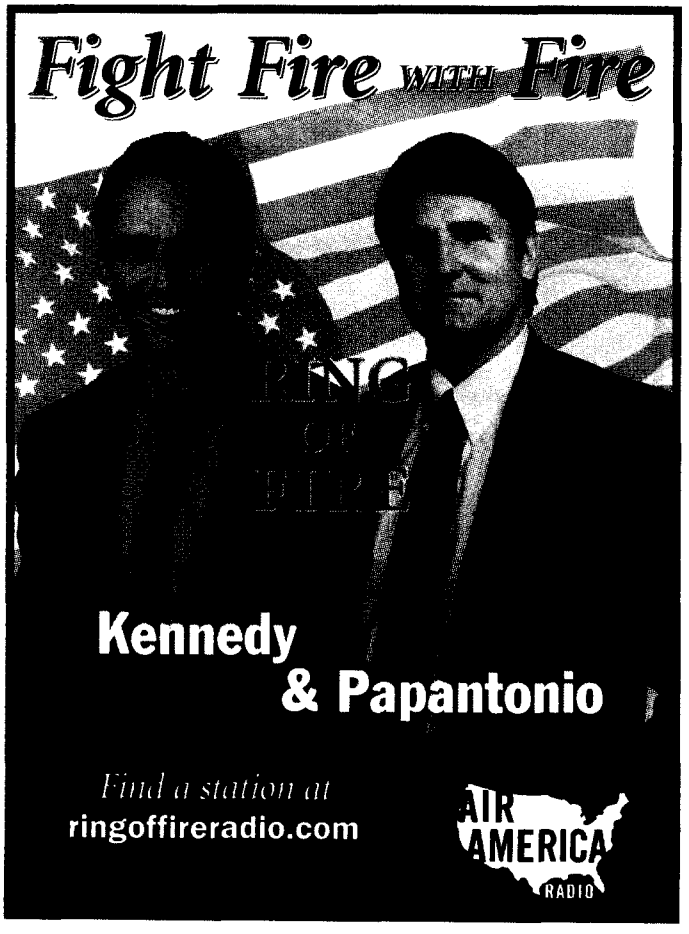

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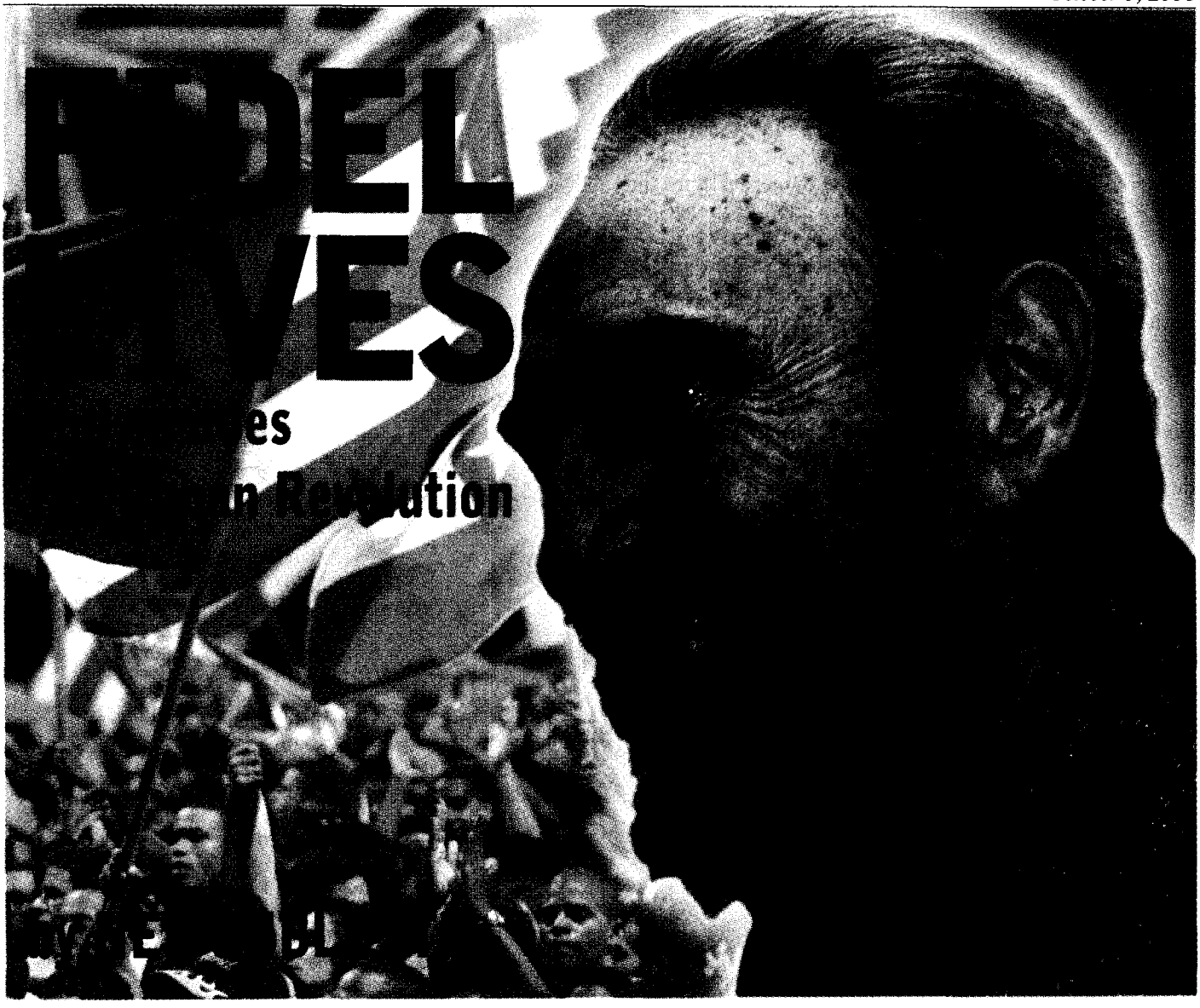

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On July 29, 1953, three days after the failure of the audacious assault on Santiago de Cuba's Moncada barracks, Fidel Castro was dead. The Cuban newspaper *Ataja* said so.

His obituary has been at the ready ever since. Editors have reached for it over and over, only to put it away again. With each premature burial, the obituary gets a little longer. Another sentence was added to it on July 31, 2006, when the world's longest-running head of state temporarily transferred various administrative functions to his brother Raúl and to other officials, as provided by Cuban law, while he underwent and recuperated from surgery for intestinal bleeding.

Until they can run Fidel's obit, the editors don't know what to print.

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Ned Sublette, author of Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo *(Chicago Review), was a John Simon Guggenheim Fellow for 2005–06. He has also been a Cullman Center Fellow at the New York Public Library and a Tulane Rockefeller Humanities Fellow at the Stone Center for Latin American Studies at Tulane University.*

They *really* want him dead in Miami, where he is deeply hated in an extraordinarily personal way. For decades the headlines there have read: Castro will fall in six months. Castro has cancer, he has Parkinson's, he fainted, he's dying, he's turning 60, he's turning 70, he's turning 80.

As the post–July 31 honking and waving died down, Republican Congressman Lincoln Díaz-Balart of Florida threatened the Cuban military with a hit list. "The military in Cuba is going to have a choice in the upcoming days and weeks and months," Oscar Corral of the *Miami Herald* quoted Díaz-Balart as saying. "They either stand with the Cuban people or their names will be on a list of infamy that the Cuban people will have access to in the future.... It's very important for the military to know that it's certainly not on [*sic*] their interest to get on that list."

The media war with Cuba employs spectacularly belligerent rhetoric. It has long been standard US government practice to refer to the Cuban government as a "regime." Regime change in Cuba is official US policy, codified in law as of 1996, when Bill Clinton signed the deliriously expansive Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act. As per that law, a Cuban government

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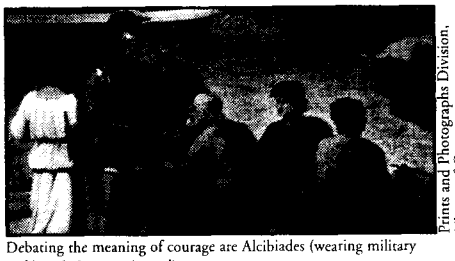

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Debating the meaning of courage are Alcibiades (wearing military garb) with Socrates (seated).

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that includes Raúl Castro is specifically unacceptable as a "transition government." So is any government that jams the propaganda broadcasts aimed at Cuba by Radio and TV Martí. Permitting them is a legal condition for recognition by the United States.

One regime threatens another. A Google search turns up 464,000 hits for "Castro regime," but "Bush regime" yields 1.4 million. On August 3, in a statement rhetorically addressed to the Cuban people, George W. Bush reinforced Díaz-Balart's threat: "We will take note of those, in the current Cuban regime, who obstruct your desire for a free Cuba."

Former United Nations ambassador Ricardo Alarcón is presumably on Washington's list of henchmen (the word is used in official United States discourse), since he is President of the People's Power National Assembly. When Alarcón was interviewed by phone on August 2 for NPR's *All Things Considered*, interviewer Michelle Norris decided that Raúl Castro was supposed to have spoken in public by then. She pressed Alarcón on it, asking, "When will the people of Cuba hear from him?"

He answered, "We don't operate on the basis of entertaining the American media."

The United States wanted drama. Havana was calm.

On December 31, 1958, Fulgencio Batista remained at the presidential palace in Havana as tanks sliced through the lines of Fidel Castro's insurgent forces at Santa Clara, smashing them and killing 3,000. At least, that was the lead international story on the front page of the *Chicago Tribune* the following day. In reality, no such thing had happened. Batista had fled, leaving behind an empty treasury.

When Fidel Castro's obituary is finally published, it will have to tell how, in the 1990s, Cuba withstood the violent economic contraction occasioned by the disappearance of the Comecon alliance, pursuant to which not only the Soviet Union but also the German Democratic Republic, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and others had figured as its trading partners. While in 1992 *Miami Herald* writer Andrés Oppenheimer was publishing his book *Castro's Final Hour*, Cuba was sharing out broadly among its people what economists like to call "austerity," without mortgaging itself to the infamous World Bank/IMF structural adjustment programs. The country came out of it staggering but on its feet, with its system intact, although at the terrible cost of a populace traumatized by long-term scarcity of food and other basic goods, and dispiriting waves of emigration. Since then Cuba's economy has continued to improve, though it does not yet seem to have reached its peak level of postrevolutionary prosperity in the late 1980s.

For many in Miami, New Jersey and elsewhere, Fidel Castro's name evokes the executions of the first days of 1959, the political prisoners, the confiscated small businesses and big plantations, the family home left behind. To them, he is the tyrant who enslaved the Cuban people and condemned Cuba to perpetual poverty and dilapidation. Given that Cuban Miami is overwhelmingly white, and Havana today is perhaps 60–70 percent people of color, he is, for some, the man who gave Cuba to the *negros*. Miami's intensely focused political and financial clout has dictated US policy toward Cuba, which is, as the old saw goes, not a foreign policy but a domestic one, aimed at currying favor with Florida—a balancing act of tough talk and impotence.

Now is the time to strengthen the embargo, the Cuban-American right has insisted for decades, with the power of popular hatred at their backs and sacks of money to drive the point home. Squeeze Castro harder, and the regime will crumble. The rightful owners will return. Anyone who wants to do business in Cuba will have to talk to us. Our experts in Florida stand ready to show the Cubans how Freedom™ and Democracy™ work. We will support our preferred electoral candidate with money, media and message. Our liberators will be welcomed with flowers by a grateful people.

From the point of view of the Miami right, Iraq was a rehearsal for Cuba, and it still looms as a prototype, albeit one that needs tweaking.

The Miami right, which counts Jeb Bush as a core member and eagerly claimed credit for the 2000 electoral victory in Florida, has long been frustrated by what it perceives as Washington's inaction. Its players were gung-ho for war in Iraq, where the scenario was the one that had long been urged for Cuba: Take out the dictator, unplug the institutions, discharge those who made the country function, move in US institutions and companies, privatize the assets, supervise elections. From that point of view, Iraq was a rehearsal, and, incredibly, it still looms as a prototype, albeit one that needs tweaking. Jon Lee Anderson's "Castro's Last Battle" in the July 24 *New Yorker*—another in the long string of Fidel Castro obits—included this remarkable statement by Florida Republican Senator Mel Martinez: "I looked for lessons from Iraq, for things the Cubans will need. For instance, a governmental structure should remain in place."

In the days after July 31, more than 150 journalists from various countries were turned back at the airport after trying to enter Cuba without the required journalist's visa. The exclusion of reporters from Cuba was not, it should be noted, total. Those already in Havana continued to report. Nor was the refusal to allow a sudden invasion by a wave of journalists an improvisation. Well-defined security procedures were in effect.

Instead of giving a speech, Raúl Castro mobilized tens of thousands of troops to be at the ready after July 31. "We could not rule out the risk of somebody going crazy, or even crazier [*loco, o más loco todavía*], within the US government," he said. In response, State Department spokesman Tom Casey nyaa-nyaahed Raúl, who has held positions of the highest responsibility in the Cuban government for forty-seven years, as "Fidel's baby brother" and "Fidel Lite."

United States visitors sometimes think Cuban officials are paranoid on the subject of US intervention. On the other hand, these paranoids really do have enemies, and the US government is being run by the people other Republicans used to call "the crazies." If you were responsible for Cuba's security, you'd take very seriously the arsenals of the north, including the ones in private hands.

Cuba has never had a 9/11-style breach of security, and not

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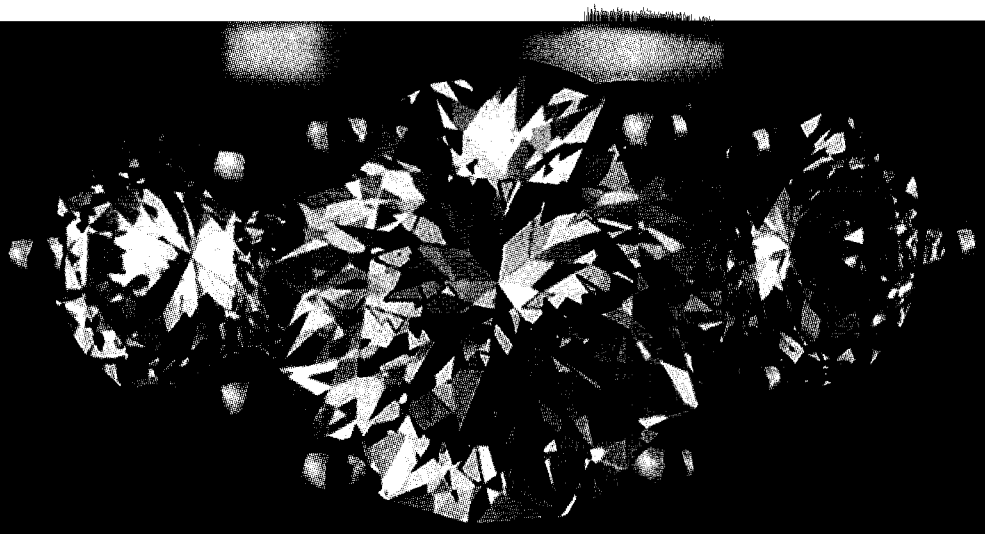

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for want of enemies. Washington knows Cuba is prepared. Shock and awe could be unleashed against Havana from the air, but Cuba could never be occupied on the ground. The island's defense is organized block by block, across its 700 miles, and the Cuban army, headed by Raúl Castro, is woven into the fabric of the society. Much of the adult population has military training, and many defenders could be armed in short order.

Nor does Cuba's defense only guard against armies and terrorists. The Cubans can evacuate 2 million people and their animals quickly when a hurricane approaches. Cuba's competence at domestic security and its preparedness for disasters contrast painfully with that of the US Department of Homeland Security, a massive instant bureaucracy that substituted for accountability after 9/11, and proved as phony as a three-dollar bill when put to the test in New Orleans.

The man who posed with a guitar while New Orleans drowned explained why he didn't know what was going on after Fidel Castro's surgery. "Cuba is not a very transparent society," he said, "so the only thing I know is what has been speculated." The last part was surely an understatement.

Lack of transparency is indeed one reason few people in the United States know much about Cuba, but I refer here to the opacity imposed by the Bush regime. It is a measure of how bad George W. Bush has been that Bill Clinton's dismal record on Cuba can be viewed with some nostalgia. After 2003 the United States moved to shut off cultural and intellectual exchange between the two places, trashing a whole generation of work in progress that was collectively giving us a remarkably detailed portrait of Cuba. Musicians from the island had become a frequent sight in US cities, but no Cuban music groups have been allowed in since 2003. Even Cuban-Americans—a community with more diversity of opinion than it is given credit for—may now only visit close relatives in Cuba, and only once every three years. Marazul Charters, a major travel provider to Cuba, flew 7,000 travelers from the United States to Cuba last year, down from 38,000 in 2003. The consequence of all this is that few people in the United States have up-to-date knowledge of Cuba. That's what I call lack of transparency, and it was very much on display in the news reports of August.

It is a measure of how bad George W. Bush has been that Bill Clinton's dismal record on Cuba can be viewed with some nostalgia.

Hundreds of thousands of US citizens saw Cuba firsthand prior to the end of 2003, when the United States stopped so-called "people to people" travel to Cuba, and educational travel was easier than it is now. They saw a lot. Cubans face serious problems, and they want something better than they have. *No es fácil* (it's not easy) is the phrase you hear repeated in Cuba as if it were a *coro* in an ongoing *son*. Salaries don't cover all the basic needs, and it is necessary to resort to an informal economy that is largely criminalized. There are clearly marked limitations on permissible public discourse. Independent newspapers don't exist. Cubans assume their phone conversations are monitored. On the other hand, infant mortality is low, the sick are cared for, people have good teeth and live a long time, no one is homeless, the children are in school, the streets haven't been taken over by AK-47-wielding drug dealers and when hurricanes come, the elderly and infirm are moved out of harm's way instead of being left behind to drown.

You're free to disagree with any of what I've just said, but please, only if you've been there. My point is: If you can't see it in action for yourself and make up your mind on the basis of personal experience, you have to get it from the media. If you're in Miami and you speak Spanish, you might get your information from *El Nuevo Herald*. Two of its staff writers and one freelancer were canned on September 7 after the paper's English-language namesake, the *Miami Herald*, blew the whistle on the fact that, in what has become a familiar pattern, they, along with journalists at other publications, had received payments from Radio/TV Martí. These taxpayer-financed entities, whose programs are received by few Cubans, are a long-running patronage piñata for Miami. Like the Voice of America, they are overseen by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, whose chief, Kenneth Tomlinson, retained his job in a September 13 party-line vote after it was revealed by the State Department's inspector general that he'd been running a horse-racing operation out of his office in Washington.

The issues that Cuba insists on—most hotly, the cases of the Cuban Five and Luis Posada Carriles, both of which have to do with terrorism directed against Cuba from the United States—are treated as very minor matters by the US press, whose readers remain largely unaware of them. The general thrust of embargo-era coverage of Cuba has been to reduce a country of 11 million people to the easily demonizable Bearded One. For decades, we have read of "Castro's Cuba," reflecting a journalistic tilt toward seeing the country as if its celebrity head of state owned it. *Forbes* lists him as one of the world's richest men—perhaps the single thing in the US press that has most offended him—by ascribing to him the island's assets.

Behind much of what we read is the same unexamined assumption underlying US policy: that the Cuban Revolution is the fantasy of a superannuated lunatic, and when he is gone it will blow down with the first strong wind. It is long past time to examine that assumption.

The people the US press calls experts were surprised to see that the Cuban government displayed considerable stability in August. The word some commentators are using to describe the present phenomenon is "institutionalization," as if Fidel and Raúl Castro, along with many others, had not dedicated much of their effort over the past five decades in Cuba to creating institutions and locking them into place.

Despite the difficulties imposed by the United States embargo, Cuba is not isolated. As of 2004, its hard-currency business has been conducted in euros instead of dollars. The Canadian company Pebercan is exploring Cuba's recently discovered offshore deposits of oil and gas in the Gulf of Mexico. On September 10 India's ONCG Videsh signed a joint-venture oil exploration agreement, and there are oil deals with companies from Malaysia, Norway and Spain. Cuba exports

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cobalt, and, with the third-largest nickel reserves in the world at a time when the price has tripled, it has a joint venture for nickel mining with China. It is difficult to see how China, already Cuba's third-largest trade partner, will not play an important role as the Chinese economy continues to expand. The United States, meanwhile, continues to be frozen out of Cuba by its own policy, which affects some regions and sectors of the US economy more than others.

Especially isolated by the embargo of Cuba is the US Gulf Coast. Trade with Havana had been a cornerstone of New Orleans's economy since colonial days, and the Port of New Orleans, a key indicator of the city's viability, took a serious hit from the imposition of the trade embargo of Cuba by President Kennedy forty-four years ago.

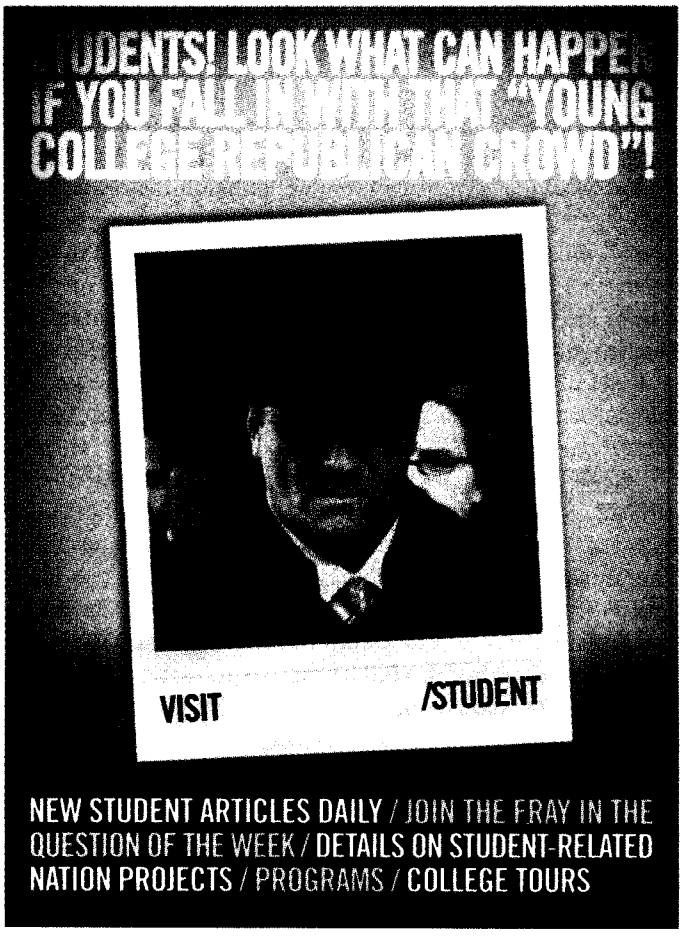
Despite Washington's hostility, Havana has been cultivating relationships with individual states of the United States and in August signed a deal for farm products from the Navajo Nation. In March 2005, not six months before Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco headed a three-day trade mission to Cuba. Congress in the last Clinton days passed a bipartisan measure permitting food and agricultural exports to Cuba, albeit for cash only, no credits. United States agricultural produce can be sold and shipped to Cuba much cheaper than Cubans can buy it elsewhere, so it's a good deal both for Cuba and for US farmers and the ports that handle the trade. Though the Bushists have sought to impede implementation of these exports, the Port of New Orleans was at the time of Blanco's visit to Cuba handling 56 percent of permitted shipments—nearly $200 million worth of goods a year, a fraction of what it could do if there were no embargo. Blanco and three state senators lunched for two hours with Fidel Castro and picked up $15 million worth of food-and-fiber business for Louisiana with the Cuban agency Alimport.

Scrapping the embargo of Cuba would help jump-start the Gulf Coast's crippled economy. But influential elements in Florida, including the President's baby brother—Dubya Lite, we could call him, inspired by the State Department's level of discourse—wouldn't like it.

The US government has on its payroll a Cuba Transition Coordinator, as if planning the future of another sovereign country were the most natural thing in the world. His name is Caleb McCarry, and he manages the day-to-day operations of the Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba, a "Cabinet-level commission" established by George W. Bush in 2004. Forget transparency: Only part of the commission's July 2006 report was made public. The rest of it was delivered directly to the President of the United States in a secret annex.

What's in the secret annex? One hundred and fifty journalists have not been hopping on planes to find out. The Cubans, who would be derelict in their responsibility to their own security to assume anything but the worst, would very much like to know.

Perhaps a clue to what's in the secret annex could be gleaned from the August 18 announcement of the appointment of thirty-two-year intelligence veteran J. Patrick Maher to the new high-level post of "mission manager" for Cuba and Venezuela. There are five other mission managers, covering counter-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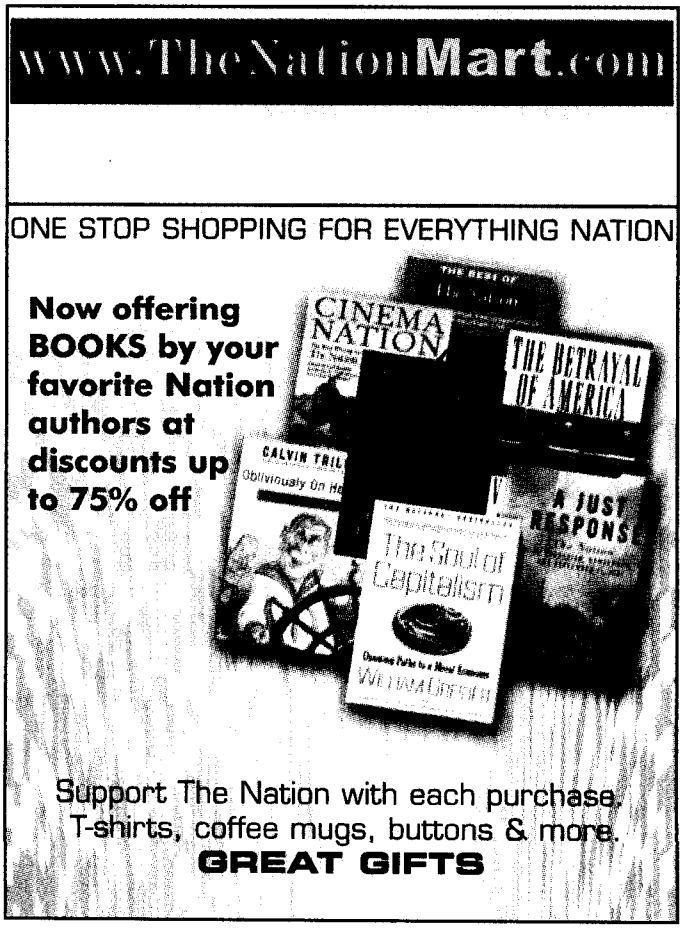
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terrorism, counterproliferation, counterintelligence and one for each of the two undestroyed Axis of Evil countries, Iran and North Korea.

Then, on September 13, the *Miami Herald* reported that since July 31 the United States had "quietly set up" five "interagency working groups to monitor Cuba and carry out US policies." One of the five groups is "strategic communications," which "seeks to ensure that Cubans understand US positions." According to the article, many members of these groups are working together at a State Department office in a "war-room-like" setting.

Fidel Castro's confinement came six weeks before he was scheduled to host the fourteenth Summit Conference of the Movement of Non-Aligned Nations, which began in Havana on, of all days, September 11. Delegations, including dozens of heads of state, arrived in Havana from 118 member countries (by way of comparison, the United Nations has 192). The Chinese conferred with Latin American ministers. A high-level North Korean delegation attended, as did Iraq's Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi. Pervez Musharraf (Pakistan) and Monmohan Singh (India) met to restart the Kashmir peace process, stalled since the July 11 Mumbai bombings. The US government declined an invitation to send an observer. NBC's Brian Williams, reporting from "Castro's Cuba," bluntly characterized the gathering of leaders from all over Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia as "some of America's biggest enemies on the planet." Most of the media interest turned on whether Fidel Castro would speak. He did not, though he did meet individually with several heads of state, including Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and India's Singh, who spoke with him for forty minutes about a range of issues and afterward told the India press, "I felt I was in the presence of one of the greatest men of our times."

Through archival clips and soundbites, Cubans have continued to hear Fidel's voice while he has been away. Famous for his endurance, he could recuperate and live to contend with an eleventh US President and, who knows, a twelfth. Or not. The irony is, it doesn't matter if Fidel Castro dies, because he already has achieved a kind of immortality. History may or may not absolve him—it depends on who writes the history—but he will not disappear, any more than Che Guevara did. He will remain as an inevitable point of reference for revolutionaries, including those who have participated in the unprecedented political realignment of the past few years in Latin America, and as an indispensable boogeyman for the right.

Meanwhile, hold off on the obituaries, because Fidel Castro is still alive. And so is the complicated phenomenon that has developed over the past few decades in Cuba, which we can refer to simply as the Cuban Revolution. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

Albion, Calif.

■ I disagree that Timothy Leary "burnt out," a term that echoes the government's smear campaign against him. The government—in the new vernacular—freaked out to find a culture countering its ideology. Frightened by the appeal of mind-altering substances—whose adherents were universally against their war in Vietnam—the politicians declared all such substances illegal and made punishments for using them as severe as for armed robbery or murder. Dr. Leary was their poster boy. What he got was a thirty-year prison sentence after being entrapped and later, when he was campaigning for governor of California, was summarily pulled from a car and thrown in jail. The offense: a marijuana roach the police said they found in the vehicle. He was humiliated, denigrated by the corporate media and put in jail. He escaped, was recaptured, hammered again in public and did his time. Consequently, I think it better said that Dr. Leary was stamped out, not burnt out. DAVID ANIRMAN

Sonoma, Calif.

■ Neal Pollack inanely parrots the hatchet job Robert Greenfield has penned as a "comprehensive biography" of Timothy Leary. Apparently, mainstream publishers and national magazines still can't resist the temptation to pontificate in moral judgment over a generation of seekers who were turned on by the creative possibilities of consciousness expansion and turned off by their culture's addictions to consumerism and militarism. (Pollack approvingly quotes Greenfield's condescending dismissal of the sixties counterculture as "a freaky mirror image of mainstream celebrity-obsessed America.") Pollack thinks Greenfield's book is "an epically thrilling, wicked epitaph for the vain, bizarre, self-promoting guru." But you have to wonder, why spend 600 pages on a sustained job of character assassination of a man who's been dead for almost ten years and presumably no longer a threat to anyone?

Greenfield has zero understanding or, apparently, real interest in the potentials of psychedelics or of Leary's bold and irreverent attempts to explore these potentials. As a close collaborator of Leary and Alpert at Harvard and Millbrook and a lifelong friend of both men, I regret having naïvely agreed to talk with Greenfield; this is tempered only by the realization that he would have written his hit piece anyway. Of course, Leary had his faults, like any man. He also had the capacity to laugh at himself and his failings, to treat everyone he encountered with total respect and generosity, and without malice. At a time when university research projects are starting to replicate studies that our Harvard project published more than forty years ago, those who would like a deeper understanding of the man and his visionary work should read the eminently fair biography by John Higgs, published only in Britain so far, *I Have America Surrounded.* RALPH METZNER
Professor emeritus, California Institute of Integral Studies
Co-author, The Psychedelic Experience

New York City

■ As Neal Pollack notes, "psychedelic" was coined by the British psychiatrist Humphry Osmond; the little-known circumstances of its birth are worth recording here. In March 1956 Aldous Huxley, in a letter to his close friend and neighbor Osmond, proposed the term "phanerothyme" for psychotomimetic agents such as mescaline and LSD: "To make this trivial world sublime,/Take half a gramme of phanerothyme." Osmond found this coinage unpleasant to the ear, and in his answer to Huxley he suggested: "To fathom Hell or soar angelic,/Just take a pinch of pychedelic." And so the word was born, in April 1956, from Greek *psych-* (soul or mind) + *deloun* (to show). Unfortunately, Osmond did not use the well-established prefix "psycho-," and so we are stuck with his eccentric spelling "psychedelic." But we can count our blessings: Osmond at least prevented Huxley from inflicting "phanerothyme" on us. (Phanerothyme? The sixties just wouldn't quite have been the sixties.) Another oddity we got stuck with is the German abbreviation LSD (Lyserg-Säure-Diäthylamid) instead of a good English LAD (lysergic acid diethylamide). WALTER D. GLANZE

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Science Fiction

WILLIAM DERESIEWICZ

THE ECHO MAKER.
By Richard Powers.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 451 pp. $25.

Richard Powers has a lot of ideas: complex, articulate, deeply informed ideas about artificial intelligence, virtual reality, relativity, genetics, music and much more. But poems, as Mallarmé told Degas, are not made of ideas, and neither are novels. *The Echo Maker* will tell you a great deal about neuroscience, environmental degradation and the migratory patterns of the sandhill crane, but like Powers's other novels, it won't tell you much about what its laboriously accumulated information and elaborately constructed concepts have to do with what it means to be alive at a particular time and place, or what it feels like. And that, crudely put, is what novels are for.

This is hardly the standard view of Powers's work. Over the past two decades, Powers has established himself as one of our most praised as well as one of our most prolific writers of fiction. *The Echo Maker* makes nine novels since 1985, with an average page count of about 430. His paperbacks come garlanded with pages of superlatives from the most reputable journals and critics. According to one reviewer, he is perhaps "America's most ambitious novelist"; according to another, he is simply "America's greatest living novelist." The MacArthur Foundation honored him with a "genius" grant as far back as 1989, and the awards have been piling up ever since. Some of this acclaim is deserved. Powers is not only adept at crafting large-scale narrative and symbolic structures; he is also a remarkably gifted aphorist, a lyrical nature writer and a sharp observer of human situations.

But the extravagant praise that has been heaped on him mainly derives, I think, from our culture's skewed understanding of the nature of fiction, and of knowledge. It's not just that we don't understand the relationship between stories and ideas, it's that there's a particular realm of ideas to which we assign supreme value: science. Much of Powers's early training was in physics and computer science, and the ideas around which he builds his novels are mostly scientific ones. (The chief exception is music, but music, with its quasi-mathematical nature, has always been the art most attractive to the scientific mind, and Powers's treatment of it often focuses, precisely, on its mathematical aspects.) It is telling that Powers is typically praised for his intellect: his "vast intelligence," "intimidating brain," "high-wattage mentality"; his ability to "think in ink." His capacity to elucidate scientific ideas and speculate about their larger meanings is indeed impressive. But intellect and scientific acumen are not synonymous,

The ecstatic praise that Richard Powers has earned reflects our confusion about the nature of fiction, and our worship of science.

though our culture seems to thinks so. "It's not rocket science," we say, or, "It's not brain surgery." So a novelist who understands science must be really smart, and a really smart novelist must be a really good one. (Was Hemingway "smart" in this sense? Was Austen, or Proust?) This confusion is no doubt compounded by the fact that, like most people, the typical book reviewer is unfamiliar with, and easily intimidated by, scientific concepts, and thus apt to defer to, if not genuflect before, those conversant with them. It is further compounded by our dimly understood but longstanding desire to "bridge the two cultures" of science and the arts (another phrase that crops up in Powers's reviews). From Matthew Arnold to C.P. Snow to today, there's been a vague feeling afloat that if only somehow those two modes of knowledge could be made to talk to each other, science would be humanized (whatever that means)

William Deresiewicz, who teaches English at Yale, is working on a cultural history of modern friendship.

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and art made relevant to the scientific age (as if it weren't already).

I doubt this demand will ever be satisfied, for the simple reason that no one really knows what it means, least of all the people who make it. But certainly one way it won't be satisfied is by treating the novel as a container for scientific ideas. This is more or less what Powers does, for example, in *The Gold Bug Variations*, the most acclaimed of his early works. The novel intertwines the story of a young couple in the 1980s investigating the identity of a mysterious older friend with that friend's story from the 1950s, when he was a brilliant young scientist investigating the genetic code and making his first discoveries about love. As the title suggests, the novel also incorporates a lot of Bach, with a coloring of Poe. Indeed, the story turns out to be merely a pretext for Powers to develop a series of (admittedly fascinating) analogies between the genetic code and the *Goldberg Variations*: each based on just four units (the four bases of DNA, the four notes of the Goldberg bass figure), each combining and recombining these units at ever greater scales to create structures of unmatched complexity. The binary code of computer programming also comes in, as Powers elaborates his insights about bootstrapping, simulation, evolutionary adaptation, the emergence of intelligence through complexity and, especially, self-awareness—the fact that a scientist investigating the genetic code is really just the genetic code, after 4 billion years, coming into consciousness of itself.

Powers's feeling for this material is exhilarating, his sense of wonder infectious. But what's missing from the novel is, well, a novel. The characters are idealized, the love stories mawkish and clichéd, the emotions meant to ground the scientific speculations in lived experience announced rather than established. The thinnest of devices are introduced to allow Powers to suspend the plot for dozens of pages at a stretch while he lays out the genetic and musicological basics that will ultimately enable him to get to the interesting stuff. (Despite its paucity of narrative or psychological complication, the novel is more than 600 pages long.) One can't help but feel that Powers is more in love with his ideas than with his story. He has been compared, predictably, to Pynchon and DeLillo, but those writers embody their perceptions about technological civilization in narratives that, however obliquely, bring out their human meanings, their impact on individual lives. What is more, Pynchon and DeLillo introduce the complexity they find in both science and the civilization it has helped create into the texture of the narratives themselves—hence both the difficulty and the depth of their work. But Powers never seems to notice that novels, too, are complex systems, like genomes, musical compositions and computer programs, subject to similar principles and entraining similar possibilities. He has been called an experimental novelist for some reason, but aside from a predilection for double plots, his approach to narrative is quite conventional, even naïve. Rather than Pynchon and DeLillo, the writer he most reminds me of is Douglas Hofstadter in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, and much of what Powers does is closer to science writing than to fiction.

For all his love of complex systems—genomes, musical compositions, computer programs—Powers's narratives are deeply conventional.

The Time of Our Singing, Powers's last novel, represented something of a departure. The book, which follows a mixed-race, musically gifted New York family from the Marian Anderson concert to the Million Man March, says little about science (though the Jewish father is a physicist, so relativity comes in occasionally) and a great deal about music and race. The music, especially, is precisely imagined and deeply felt; Powers is an accomplished vocalist. Still, one rarely escapes the feeling that he is perpetually trying to prove something. When he isn't at the lectern, he's at the podium or the pulpit. His denunciations of racial prejudice, however just, are a little hard to take; at once pious and self-righteous, they make you feel as if you were being jabbed in the chest by someone on the verge of bursting into tears. Powers has been praised for his big heart as well as his big brain, but a bleeding heart isn't necessarily a big one, and if his intellectualism is really didacticism, his humanism is really sentimentalism. One mark of the sentimentalist, who glorifies his own emotions, is that he tends to be blind to their contradictions. Here Powers constructs an enormous novel to tell us, in part, that white people will never be able to understand or accept black people (so black people should stick to their own culture and their own kind). So what's a white Midwesterner doing writing a novel like this? The question is not merely churlish; Powers may know music inside and out, but he clearly knows black culture only out. (He's also pretty weak on Jews and New York.) Flesh them as he might with scene and story, the bones of his conception of black America are a bundle of familiar stereotypes: the tragic mulatto, the dignified striver, the hunted radical, the gutsy activist; gospel music, family warmth, home truths and home cooking.

The Echo Maker marks both a further departure in promising directions and the return of old problems. Powers's characters are newly individualized, complex and flawed, their stories closer than before to the emotional bone. But the science is back, and the textbookery with it. The novel is set in Kearney, Nebraska, by the vast, shallow Platte, in the midst of the soul-crushing emptiness of the Great Plains. Mark Schluter, 27-year-old slaughterhouse mechanic, screw-up and fun-loving good old boy, flips his pickup on a desolate road one frozen night, putting himself into a coma and bringing his older sister Karin back from Sioux City, which, despite longer flights to bigger places, is as far as she's managed to land from Kearney's slow collapse and the get-rich-quick futility and save-me-Jesus fanaticism of, respectively, their father and mother (both now dead). Mark has a couple of drinking buddies and a girlfriend of convenience. Karin has two old flames: Robert, now a developer, and Daniel, now an environmental activist. But when Mark starts to wake up, it becomes clear that he's suffering from Capgras' syndrome, a rare neurological disorder in which one recognizes loved ones but feels nothing for them, becoming convinced that they're impostors. Mark's "doubling" begins with a distraught Karin but eventually spreads to his dog, his buddies and even the town itself. Enter, at Karin's desperate request, Gerald Weber, celebrated neurologist and author and a dead ringer for Oliver Sacks; a stranger mistakes him, at one point, for the author of *The Man Who Mistook His Life for a....* Weber's books are actually called *Wider Than the Sky*, *The Three-Pound Infinity* and, just coming out as the novel opens, *The Country of Surprise*. But the unexpectedly harsh reception that greets this last one, together with Weber's unaccountable attraction for Mark's unaccountably sophisticated and eerily familiar health aide, sends Weber into a downward spiral that turns Nebraska into a true country of surprise and ends up making him wonder what indeed he has mistaken his life for.

There is much here that's quite good. Powers's characters tend to be paragons, intellectual or ethical, but Mark, in particu-

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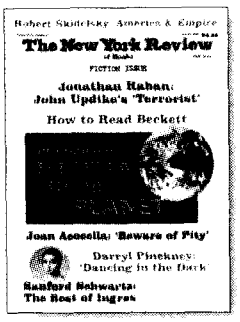
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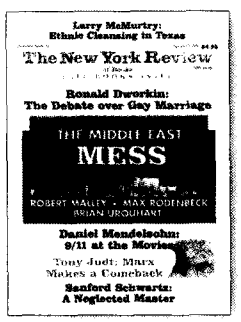
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lar, is convincingly imagined, with a fine ear for his verbal and mental rhythms: "But no, the university chick tells him, with a mouth like two little bait worms doing it. Useful little mouth, probably, in a pinch." This is a vividly interesting sound, and it gives us Mark in all his moral grossness and keen if untutored wit. Earlier, as Mark's brain struggles to reassemble itself into full consciousness, Powers improvises some striking wordplay: "He says nothing. Some things say him. What's on his mind hops off"; "Words click through his head, an endless freight. Sometimes he runs alongside, peering in. Sometimes these words peer out, finding him." In its free-associative sense of discovery, this is well above the self-conscious groan-making of Powers's usual wordplay (e.g., Goldberg/Gold Bug). And Powers's eye for social detail remains as sharp as ever, whether we're in a motel—"He went up to a room that pretended it had never been inhabited by anyone"—or a rehabilitation center—"Two papery women with walkers slid past her, a foot race in suspended animation."

The range and magnitude of Powers's talents are not in question. What's in question is the kind of work he uses them to produce. I probably don't need to tell you at this point that Weber enters the story smuggling a large load of neurological learning that takes much of the rest of the novel to unpack: the mind's profound strangeness, which it is the mind's own duty to conceal; the fragility, even fictitiousness, of the self; the distributed nature of consciousness among a plethora of neurocognitive modules. Powers's deepest interests recur in new forms: signals and symbols, and the capacity to make them; the way organisms, and especially their brains, are shaped by—are, in a sense, solutions to—the world in which they live. Neuroscience passes here into environmentalism, another longstanding object of Powers's ethical fervor. The story is set against the annual migrations of the sandhill crane through the Platte valley (the cranes are the "Echo Makers" of the title, in Anishinaabe lore, though of course the phrase develops an extremely wide resonance). Powers's descriptions of the spectacle are sublime, as is his vision, woven into the novel's metaphorical texture, of the human species as but another evanescent episode in life's vast flow. The cycling of time, the interconnectedness of all living things, the mind-blowing—indeed, mind-creating—magnificence of nature, the obligation to live humbly and responsibly: All of Powers's great themes return here.

And once again, they bury the story that's meant to bear them. However individual Mark sounds, other characters, especially Karin, often sound like Powers's mouthpiece: "The brain is a mind-boggling redesign," a doctor says with his creator's folksy pedantry, and, with a whiff of Powers's glutinous sentimentality, "a record of the long way here." "We pushed through the paper recycling plant," Robert boasts in self-defense, "I call it Mea Pulpa." Powers also tries to keep too many balls in the air. Neuroscience and environmentalism may be braided together thematically, but not on the level of the plot, which finally frays altogether. Weber's identity crisis, meant to parallel Mark's and Karin's, is unconvincing. (I'm honor bound to note that it's precipitated by a bad review, one that Weber rationalizes by telling himself, "In the field of public reviewing, one scored zero for appreciating an already appreciated figure. With a target as large as Gerald Weber, one earned points only for a kill." However uncomfortable the irony here, I see no reason for a mea pulpa.) And the resolutions of the novel's tensions and mysteries—will Mark recover? what happened the night of the accident? just who is that health aide?—feel perfunctory or contrived, failed *frissons* and muffed epiphanies.

The problem, of course, is that Powers's mind is elsewhere, with the wonders of the brain and the interconnectedness of all living things. Instead of letting the story speak, he is the only one who speaks. Instead of locating meaning in experience, he locates it in ideas. But novels should test ideas, not surrender to them. The same is true of beliefs. Powers's pious self-righteousness is expressed here through Daniel, the Christ-like environmentalist who lives on couscous and currants, turns his heat off at night and finally flees the all-too-human world. Powers is as ethically coercive as he is intellectually pedantic. One is no more inclined to argue with his environmentalism here than with his condemnation of racial injustice in *The Time of Our Singing*. But the novelist who refuses to grant his readers imaginative and moral freedom—the two are the same, and connected to the characters' own autonomy—is serving neither the cause of art nor of justice. ■

Laundry

Our cat, who's over nineteen, likes to sleep
on the massed softness of a pile of shirts,
two, three, four, flung on the floor
but soon to be gathered up
and taken to the laundry,
where the proprietress
gives out brief but mordant bulletins
about her teenage girls. *Boys easier.*
You're lucky. My daughter very bad,
she barks one day. The next week things are worse.
Too much trouble with my younger daughter.
She tell me we are not in China now,
she can do what she want. I'm very tired.
Next week: *We have a saying:*
there are three kinds of people.
First kind know right thing to do and do it
without being told. Second kind
not know but will do if someone tell them.
Third kind: even if you tell them, nothing!
She takes the wad of fading rainbow shirts
I push across the counter toward her, shoots
back this week's clean ones, wrapped in crisp brown paper,
soon to go soft and pungent in their turn.

Rachel Hadas

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Father Knows Best

NICHOLAS GUYATT

REVOLUTIONARY CHARACTERS: What Made the Founders Different.
By Gordon S. Wood. Penguin Press. 321 pp. $25.95.

Have you attacked the Founding Fathers recently? Do you know anyone who has? Gordon Wood is convinced that you're out there, and that many of you (especially those who teach history) have embarked on a campaign to ignore or even to "dehumanize" Washington, Jefferson and their peers. In doing this, you've betrayed the majority of Americans who feel a special attachment to the Revolutionary generation and who want to know "what Thomas Jefferson would think of affirmative action, or George Washington of the invasion of Iraq." This kind of sniping has been going on for 100 years, Wood concedes, but things have gotten particularly bad of late. Professors are steering students and readers toward alternative histories that disparage the Founders or simply overlook them. It's all very well to write about "a midwife in Maine or a former slave in Connecticut," but we're losing sight of the white elite who should be at the center of America's creation story.

Wood can be quite a curmudgeon. He's also perhaps the most celebrated American historian alive, the author of one book—*The Creation of the American Republic*—that transformed the field in 1969 and another that won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993. His latest volume, *Revolutionary Characters*, has been packaged as an argument about "what made the Founders different." In fact, it's a collection of eight discrete essays, some of them rather creaky. (The chapter on John Adams is adapted from *Creation*; the original version of the epilogue was published in 1974.) But given the recent upsurge of popular interest in the Founders, you can see the appeal of this collection. All of your Founding Favorites are here: Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, Hamilton, Madison, Adams and Paine. The coup de grâce is an essay on Aaron Burr, the bad boy of the early Republic, whose moral divergence from the rest allows Wood to present him as "the exception that proves the rule" of Revolutionary genius.

The Founderphilia of recent years, as Daniel Lazare has observed in these pages, is in part a response to 9/11. David Hackett Fischer, who won the Pulitzer Prize last year for *Washington's Crossing*, concluded that book by linking the challenges of Revolutionary America to the destruction of the World Trade Center. (In an even more vertiginous analogy, Fischer likened George Washington to Norman Schwarzkopf and Tommy Franks.) The other inspiration behind the upsurge in Founding Father studies was Monicagate and the perception that Bill Clinton's gropes and fumbles represented a lapse of character. The Founders had their own problems with sexual continence, but recent historians have tended to close the bedroom door and to define character as an "outer life" (in Wood's phrase) rather than an "inner personality." Washington and the rest were committed to the maintenance of gentility and the performance of an exemplary public persona. By this standard, Clinton's private antics with Monica leached into the public life of the nation, proving him to be a man of limited character in both senses. The Founding Fathers, according to their recent panegyrists, offer a window onto an age when people behaved much better—or at least kept up appearances more effectively than the most recent Democratic occupant of the White House.

The current bout of Founderphilia had seized some prominent historians even before 9/11. Joseph Ellis's sympathetic portrait of the Revolutionary generation, *Founding Brothers*, was a bestseller in 2000. David McCullough's *John Adams* raced up the bestseller lists the following spring. But the terrorist attacks encouraged this shift toward simpler, more flattering portraits of the Founding period. McCullough's *John Adams*—in which a principled but unpopular President struggles to do the right thing in a time of war—had sold more than 1.5 million copies in hardcover by the end of 2001. Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the most colorful of the Founders, has been treated to four major biographies in the past three years—one of them by Gordon Wood. McCullough, who has written books on Harry S. Truman and a host of other subjects in American history, followed up *John Adams* with *1776*, another chronicle of the Revolutionary generation. Even George Washington, whose glacial detachment had previously deterred the peppiest biographers, has recently received the sympathetic attention of Ellis and Fischer. Some of these books have come from writers who don't hold academic posts (like McCullough), but the Founderphile charge has been led by academics who hold some of the top jobs in the profession: Edmund Morgan of Yale; Joseph Ellis of Mount Holyoke; David Hackett Fischer of Brandeis; Gordon Wood of Brown. With these heavy hitters batting for the team, how can Wood believe that the Founders are in trouble?

This may be a generational thing. Readers under 40 (60?) will be amused by Wood's rueful attack on J.D. Salinger for corrupting the young via Holden Caulfield and "his condemnation of adult phoniness." Although Wood also enlists Dave Eggers to make his point—that we're too ready to embrace cynicism and that we've taken a principled stand against any kind of principle—you get the impression that he's been out of touch with the zeitgeist for some time. (If Salinger gives him the willies, what must he think of *The Simple Life* or G-Unit?) But his anxiety has more to do with those who write American history than with its readership. His tart references to Maine midwives and Connecticut free blacks are a warning about a politically correct American history: As professors and graduate students choose to focus on people who were left out of the traditional narrative, the historical profession runs the risk of forgetting that narrative altogether.

In fact, there's very little evidence of the Founders disappearing from the teaching or writing of American history. In addition to the enormous popularity of John Adams and the like, the actions of the Revolutionary leaders are exhaustively debated in academic journals, textbooks and scholarly studies. In the past four decades, American history has been invigorated by a new awareness of women, nonwhite people, culture and other neglected topics. But you'll find little evidence from college textbooks or academic journals that the American past has been hijacked by black midwives. Professional historians work hard to incorporate social and cultural history, but they hardly neglect the more familiar

Nicholas Guyatt teaches history at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. His book Providence and the Invention of the United States *will be published next year by Cambridge.*

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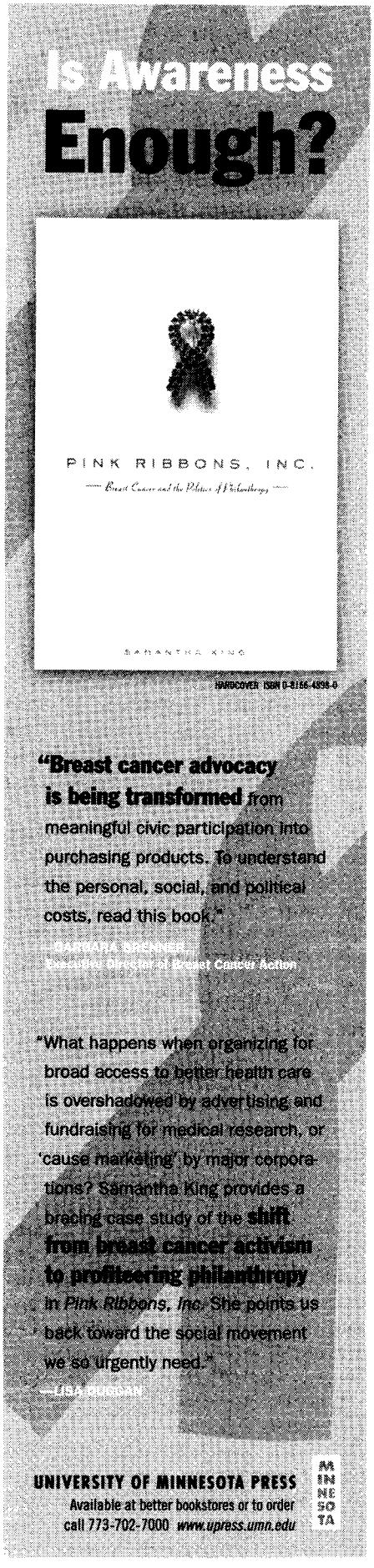
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political questions and actors. Wood's fear that Washington or Adams will drop out of the frame seems misplaced.

But the pages of *Revolutionary Characters* convey Wood's genuine concern that irresponsible academics or cynical undergraduates might soon topple the statues of the Founders and raise false idols in their place. Hence he has crafted an argument to protect the reputation of the Founding generation from the most vituperative critic. Washington and the "Revolutionary leadership," according to Wood, created the American Republic and then encouraged its democratic development even though this hastened their own demise. Men like Jefferson and Madison were aristocrats in the best sense of the word: They cultivated civilized values and a sense of the public good with a selflessness that qualified them to lead the nation. But they also encouraged a growing democratic spirit that finally overwhelmed them. The Founders were different from the men who followed, in that they acted with nobility and self-sacrifice while their successors became self-interested and crass. But the Founders' achievement was to turn at least some of their transcendent beliefs into a political system of guile and beauty that could withstand the basest demagogue and the most rapacious businessman. The difference between the Founders and ordinary Americans, for Wood, is both a fact (enshrined in the Constitution) and a challenge, perhaps even an inspiration. The Founders were different, but their high example remains a guide to successive generations.

What's wrong with this picture? Wood refers without any apparent irony to the "Revolutionary elite" who led the struggle against Britain, but the idea of a founding pantheon seems odd, for a couple of reasons. First, the Founders were remarkably disputatious. Although they supported the Patriot cause during the Revolution, they were soon at one another's throats. Not even Washington was immune. During the turbulent 1790s, Thomas Paine wrote an especially biting pamphlet attacking the Father of the Nation, and Jefferson and Madison whispered about Washington's senility and his deference to Hamilton from across the Cabinet table. Wood's portrayal of Aaron Burr as the runt of the litter is understandable. In spite of his distinguished lineage (his father and his grandfather were Princeton presidents), Burr created mayhem by trying to snatch the election of 1800 from Jefferson, his running mate; then he courted infamy in 1804 by killing Alexander Hamilton in a duel. But Burr's flashy malfeasance should not obscure the fact that, after the British withdrawal in 1783, the other Founders were more often upbraiding one another than speaking with a single voice about the future of the nation.

We might also ask who qualifies as a Founder. In his introduction, Wood bestows Founding status upon some interesting characters: financier Robert Morris and Supreme Court Justice James Wilson, both of whom enjoyed prodigious careers and yet found themselves in debtors' prison in 1798. But these intriguing men all but disappear from the main chapters of the book, leaving the predictable gallery of Jefferson, Adams and the rest. If the definition of a Founder is a person who played a role in winning the American Revolution and establishing American independence, could we count Boston shoemaker George Hewes among their ranks? Hewes helped to pour the East India Company's precious tea into Boston Harbor in December 1773, and during the Revolution he served on an American privateer, a commercial vessel empowered by the Continental Congress to attack British ships. Or could we nominate Lemuel Haynes, a black minuteman who served in the Continental army during the early part of the war and then became a staunch Federalist in the 1790s? Or Mercy Otis Warren, who wrote Patriot propaganda during the war and later crafted one of the earliest histories of the Revolution to remind her fellow Americans of what they had achieved?

Hewes didn't leave much of a paper trail from the Revolutionary period, but Haynes and Warren did. Again, one wonders about Wood's criteria for admission into the Founding club, and about what made his Founders different from these other participants in the Revolution. Although Wood implies that the Revolutionary elite shared a vision of themselves and of America's future, we know that their arguments weren't cosmetic but fundamental to the nation's prospects. Hamilton admired the commercial transformation of Britain in the eighteenth century, and he marveled at Britain's extraordinary and apparently spontaneous ability to bully the rest of Europe. After 1783 he reasoned that the United States could follow the British example by adopting a strong federal government. Jefferson and Madison were wary of the influence of a new financial class over the highest departments of government; they envisaged a smaller federal bureaucracy and the expansion of agriculture into the Western Territory. Neither the Federalists—Hamilton's party—nor Jefferson's Republicans triumphed in

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this battle, and the hybrid commercial/agricultural nation that emerged from their tussle hardly proves the Goldilocks argument that America was just right in its nineteenth-century development. (The Civil War, or the serial tragedies of Indian removal, should be enough to spoil your porridge.) So why should we assume a common identity that bound together the various proponents of the United States after 1776, or downplay the Founders' divergent philosophies and heated arguments?

Wood sidesteps these problems by suggesting that the Founders were united by a benign elitism: They rose from relatively humble origins on the fringes of Britain's vast empire and made strenuous efforts to become "natural" aristocrats. Wood assures us that this process of self-fashioning was driven by disinterestedness and a sense of duty rather than by ambition. Jefferson may have known more about wine than anyone else in America, but he cultivated this knowledge because he believed that refined tastes were essential to public morality. Hamilton was eager to strengthen the executive, and he held some troubling views about America's military potential, but he also looked to the populace to return natural aristocrats to office at election time. Another shared experience that defined the Founders was their surrender of power in the nineteenth century. As the American people elected ordinary men to public office, showing they had little faith in the idea of a disinterested elite, the selfless aristocracy of the Revolutionary generation fell by the wayside. Madison and Jefferson lived long enough to see the rise of Andrew Jackson, the earthy Tennessean who claimed to embody, rather than to manage, the desires of ordinary Americans. The Founders had not envisaged this kind of politics, and survivors like Jefferson and Madison were appalled by Jackson's ascent in the early 1820s. But they'd built a government that allowed for a true democracy and that was brilliantly equipped to curb its excesses.

Again, this vision of a selfless, heroic elite makes less sense if we broaden our definition of who qualifies as a Founder. Consider Wood's discussion of how Madison came to support a strong federal government by 1787. According to Wood, Madison became disillusioned with state politicians and local power when he was forced (by term limits in the Confederation Congress) to spend four sessions in the Virginia legislature. Between 1784 and 1787, as the nation labored under the loose Articles of Confederation, which had been drafted during the Revolution, Madison witnessed firsthand the selfishness of ordinary politicians. Wood sees these state representatives through Madison's eyes: They were "clods" who "had no regard for public honor or honesty," and they passed bills that advanced their own interests rather than the greater good of the state or the nation. But when you examine this episode more carefully, you begin to realize that Madison was upset not by the personal selfishness of these representatives but by their commitment to their poorer constituents.

The Virginia Assembly, like many other state legislatures, spent the 1780s responding to the financial crisis that followed the Revolutionary War. The national government was broke; so were the states, which struggled to pay back the debts they'd incurred fighting the war. Ordinary Americans had initially financed this debt with war bonds, but the prolonged conflict and worsening financial climate had forced many poorer farmers and workers to sell their bonds at a fraction of the original value. By the 1780s the Revolutionary debt had been largely transferred out of the hands of ordinary people and into the portfolios of wealthy investors; the states were therefore obliged to pay interest on these debts to speculators, and to tax ordinary people to pay for this. The landscape of state politics in the 1780s was dominated by populist economics: Representatives were encouraged by their constituents (often in person) to pass debt relief, to curb the tax burden and to increase the supply of credit and paper money. State representatives were also pressured by ordinary people to cancel the Revolutionary debt, since it was now held not by the original Patriots who'd funded it but by an opportunistic class of financiers and investors.

Wood seems to agree with Madison that these representatives were clods for complying with the requests of the voters. In a revealing passage, he upbraids populist legislators for fueling inflation and "victimizing creditor minorities." But it seems churlish to present these locally minded politicians as derelict or to suggest that their vision for America was less legitimate than that of the Revolutionary elite. Wood takes the longer view here. Madison and especially Hamilton believed that the American Republic would never succeed unless it was fortified against this excess of democracy. Although poorer Americans could lament that they'd sold their war bonds at such a loss and that their taxes were giving wealthy speculators an annual return of perhaps 30 percent on their investment, struggling farmers had not actually been compelled to part with the debt certificates. Nothing illegal had taken

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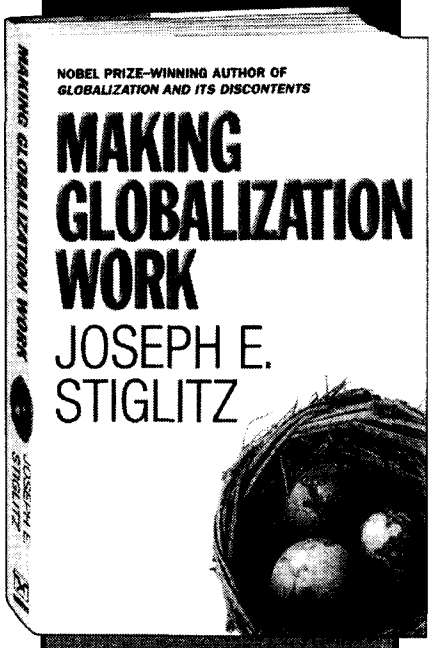

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place. Madison grappled with the morality of all this in a way that Hamilton never did; when Hamilton proposed in 1790 that the federal government should assume all these state debts and guarantee huge profits to the speculators, Madison fretted about the appearance of unfairness that might easily turn voters against the new Constitution. But Wood is surely right to argue that both Madison and Hamilton wanted to build a United States from the top down, rather than the bottom up: They looked to wealthy individuals as the most important supporters (and sponsors) of the government and expected that the population at large would defer to their broader vision of federal power.

The question of popular acquiescence in the Founders' achievement is, in some respects, the most baffling part of Wood's book. Although Wood keeps reassuring us that ordinary Americans will eventually wrest the Republic from the Revolutionary elite, there are few of these poorer sorts to balance the Revolutionary Characters featured in every chapter. Andrew Jackson, he rightly observes, was a very different product of the political process than Thomas Jefferson. But the contrast between the two men—between an era of elites and an age of democracy—is presented by Wood as another case of Great Men talking to other Great Men in the Founding period. There was a good deal of grassroots democracy in the 1780s and '90s, but local politicians and their engaged constituents struggle to make it past the red rope that Founderphiles like Wood have thrown around the Revolutionary generation. Ordinary Americans demanded a say in the political process before the Constitution was drafted; they mobilized societies, newspapers and candidates to take back control from the Federalists when, as many of them feared, the "miracle at Philadelphia" produced a government that was unresponsive to their concerns. Jefferson and Madison certainly encouraged this process from the federal capital of Philadelphia and from their country seats at Monticello and Montpelier, but the demand for popular participation in government and decision-making arose from below. Wood's notion—that the Founders used their superior vision and integrity to birth a hurly-burly politics that was vulgar but democratic—seems as backward as it is quaint.

Given the circumstances of the Constitutional Convention, in which fifty-five delegates were hastily assembled in Philadelphia to draft a completely new form of government without any public knowledge of what they were doing, we can reasonably argue that a Revolutionary elite seized control of America's destiny in 1787 and set the nation on a different course from the one its people would have liked. (The state conventions that narrowly ratified the Constitution in the following months were an unreliable guide to the feelings of most voters.) Can we also say that the participation of succeeding generations in that political system confirms the prescience and superior wisdom of the Revolutionary elite? If an uncouth soldier like Andrew Jackson could be elected to the White House in 1828, but would then willingly follow George Washington's example by retiring in 1837, does this prove that the Founders passed down a political system that made the United States safe for democracy?

I don't mean to be glib about this question, not least because the early American Republic did a better job of providing liberty and opportunity to white men than virtually any other government on the planet. But in answering it, we should consider the experience of those Americans who were excluded from political participation. The assumption of most books about the Founders is that they created a system that naturally expanded to encompass everyone. If you're a recent immigrant from Laos or Guatemala who has become an American citizen, the liberties and prerogatives enshrined in the Constitution belong to you in the same way that they belong to those Americans who can trace their families back to the Mayflower. You can't run for President—unless Orrin Hatch manages to change the rules for Arnold—but otherwise you're thoroughly equal under the law. This thinking about inclusion and equality isn't a modern invention: Go back to 1784, when Jefferson considered what to do with the boundless territory that covered the present-day Midwest, and you'll see an admirable desire to extend equal citizenship into these new areas. Jefferson believed that a settler who took up residence in Indiana or Wisconsin should, as quickly as possible, receive the same rights as a resident of Massachusetts or Virginia. British policymakers had looked into the American West and imagined an empire of subjects and second-class citizens; Jefferson and the Founders, by contrast, envisaged an empire of liberty.

But this liberty came to depend on the denial of freedom to Native Americans, just as the liberties claimed by white Southerners before and after the Civil War were grounded in the subjugation of African-Americans. Wood touches on nonwhite people only briefly, insisting that the Founders would have liked to abolish slavery and to treat the Indians with respect. But one thing that the Revolutionary elite agreed upon was that the rights of white people should be privileged over those of nonwhites, from the formation of Indian policy in the old Northwest Territory to the protection of slavery in the Constitution. While it's true that many of the Founding generation hoped that slavery would eventually disappear, and that Jefferson paid lip service to the idea of assimilating Native Americans as full citizens, none of the Founders could muster the conviction and the consistency to promote a Republic of racial inclusion. As historian Anthony Wallace has shown, Jefferson gradually undermined the basis for Indian acculturation and channeled his enthusiasm into cultural nostalgia rather than the welfare of Indian nations. Madison, meanwhile, spent his last years as president of the American Colonization Society, a private organization that was committed to removing black Americans to the white-run colony of Liberia. Gordon Wood would probably say that the Virginian titans had simply lived too long, but the racial di-

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lemmas that clouded their later years were the product of a system they had created.

More significant for Wood's bigger argument about a democratic legacy, racial exclusion played a critical role in securing popular support for the Constitution and federal power. For the white settlers of Ohio and Kentucky, the most appealing thing about a national government was its willingness to expedite Indian removal, either by providing the federal troops who would settle local disputes between settlers and Indians or by ensnaring Native leaders in traps of debt and commercial dependency, which facilitated the seizure of Indian land. The Federalists were already doing this in the 1790s, having eschewed the role of impartial umpire (with which the British briefly flirted). The Republican Party perfected this idea of the federal government as the guarantor of white expansion, under the uninterrupted leadership of Jefferson, Madison and James Monroe in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. When Andrew Jackson won the White House in 1828, it was his reputation as an Indian killer that endeared him to many ordinary Americans. Indian killers also featured on the winning tickets in 1836 and 1840, bolstering the appeal of career politicians from New York (Martin Van Buren) and Virginia (John Tyler), respectively. Soon after his inauguration, Jackson rewarded his supporters by pursuing the most aggressive campaign of racial removal in American history, an effort all the more shocking since it targeted Cherokees, Creeks and other Indians in the Southeastern states who had made the most strenuous efforts to adopt white "civilization."

Democracy in the early Republic was a turbulent mix of popular participation and racial exclusion. The Constitution encouraged both, and we distort the achievements and limitations of the Founders by focusing on one aspect at the expense of the other. Unless we're willing to consider what Thomas Jefferson thought about Native Americans, or what Alexander Hamilton thought about immigration, or what James Madison thought about black people, we shouldn't spend our time trying to determine what the Founders would make of affirmative action or the war in Iraq. Alternatively, we could abandon the idea of a Revolutionary elite and create a new history of the Founding period in which the array of Americans who supported independence from Britain—which included blacks, women and unlettered white people, as well as Wood's aristocratic leadership—are recognized but not homogenized. Many historians are already at work on this project, though they're competing with Founderphiles who have transfixed the media and the publishing industry. Perhaps this revolution in the writing and teaching of American history will also come from the bottom up. ■

FILMS

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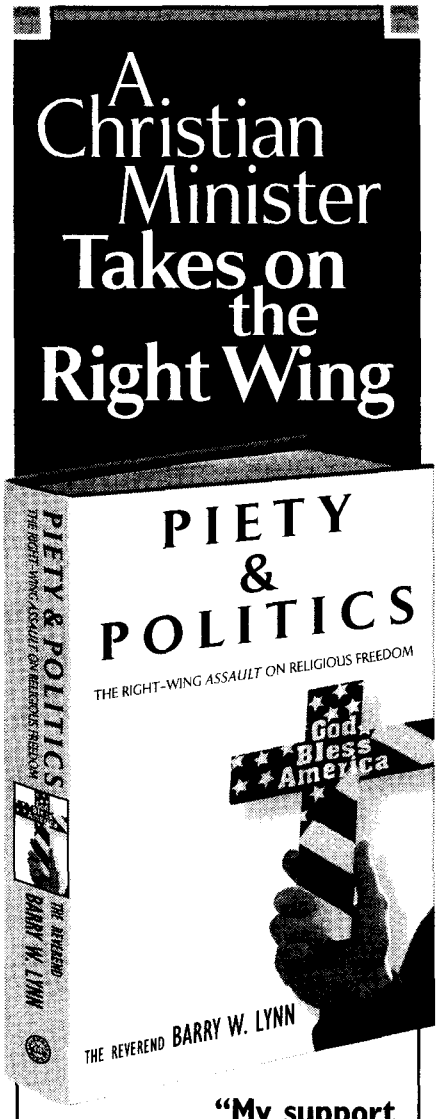
THE BLACK DAHLIA • OLD JOY

Because it wasn't entirely clear to me when I left the theater just who had done what to whom, and why, you needn't worry that I will give away the plot of *The Black Dahlia*. All I really understand about this story of late-1940s Los Angeles—not so much a city, you'd think, as a tar pit, bubbling with near-universal ickiness—is that a character in it once slapped up a shoddy housing development, using materials scavenged from Mack Sennett's studio.

As with the setting, so with the film itself: *The Black Dahlia* turns out to be something of questionable structural integrity, pieced together from old movies.

Normal filmgoers may now stop reading, knowing that *The Black Dahlia* will not give them the usual satisfactions of a good story told on Saturday night. Only viewers with the patience of true auteurists are likely to be rewarded by *The Black Dahlia*. They will have seen Brian De Palma before at his directorial games and will expect him to treat this plot as a distraction, in two senses of the word: as an inconvenience to be endured and as a diversion to hold the viewer while a trick is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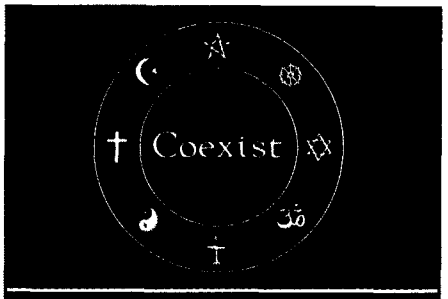

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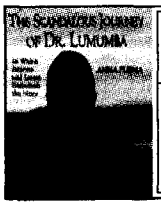

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done. The question is, what trick did De Palma carry off this time, under the pretext of making a police thriller? What might it mean that the form of his new movie flagrantly imitates a crime?

The beginnings of an answer lie in the movie's source material—a well-regarded novel by James Ellroy—and in the real event that provided the core for Ellroy's fiction.

In early 1947 the naked corpse of a 22-year-old woman, Elizabeth Short, was discovered in a vacant lot in downtown Los Angeles. In life, as one of Hollywood's innumerable aspiring actresses, Short had stood out only because of the black wardrobe she'd affected, set off by a flower in her long, wavy hair. In death, she was distinguished by the gruesomeness of her murder. Even Jack the Ripper's victims had not been so mutilated. In the public's mind, or the part of it that was fed by newspapers, Elizabeth Short's hacked-up body quickly became a site where fantasies coalesced: images from the movies and about the movie business, fears about city life, anxieties about the sexual wants of young women. A fascinated city took to calling Short the Black Dahlia—substituting a lurid nickname for an obscure, now-unknowable person—while telling itself endless stories of what she might have done, and how she might have died.

Too many stories? According to the fictional narrative of *The Black Dahlia*, people who ought to have been thinking of other things were busy instead with the Elizabeth Short mystery, and so allowed all manner of betrayals, tragedies and crimes to play out. (Auteurists may insert here a list of earlier De Palma films that dwelt on the sin of prurient inattention—I'll spot you *Body Double*—and for ten bonus points may cite precedents from the work of Alfred Hitchcock.) But, to stick to the case: Among the distractable types in *The Black Dahlia*, none is more at fault than the film's point-of-view character and voiceover narrator, a young police detective named Bucky Bleichert (Josh Hartnett).

He's unreliable, of course—and not just because he's set up as the standard film noir sap, infinitely gullible and infinitely horny. The very first shot in the movie finds Bucky in the locker room of a boxing arena, preparing to fight in a publicity fundraiser for the police department. The story you're about to hear is therefore being recalled by a guy who's had his brains rattled. Punch-drunkenness may help explain, if not excuse, the ensuing fuzziness about who did what, etc. It certainly provides the only possible justification for later episodes in *The Black Dahlia* that are so clichéd as to seem lifted from a 1947 B picture, or so preposterous as to be worthy of a Monty Python broadcast.

We are not just watching a movie about the workings of the public imagination; we are temporarily shut within those imaginings. So, when people make love, they must tear at one another's clothes, rip the cloth and dishes from the dinner table (since no other horizontal surface is immediately available) and never, ever close the venetian blind. (Auteurists take note: Hartnett keeps his hat on, paying tribute to Michel Piccoli in *Contempt* paying tribute to Dean Martin in *Some Came Running*.) Expository dialogue must be rattled off as quickly as possible, sometimes in a state of hysteria, just to satisfy the audience that an explanation has been given (even if it can't be followed). Revelations about someone's character, by contrast, must be shouted at the viewer and then repeated so they sink in—as when the story's enigmatic blonde (Scarlett Johansson) catches Bucky with the plot's enigmatic brunette (Hilary Swank) and bellows, "She looks like that dead girl!! How sick are you?!" Because Johansson's character is one of the common people, she is afforded this melodramatic gravitas. Swank's character, though, is a rich girl whose father and mother talk in phoney-baloney accents, and so they are treated as comic grotesques.

Does *The Black Dahlia* ever touch on a credible human reality? Yes—though it does so, paradoxically, during a few glimpses of the absent mystery woman. You see Elizabeth (Mia Kirshner) only as an image in various black-and-white films—screen tests, for the most part—that Bucky has located for his investigation. These are scenes of routine, unquestioning male domination. A man's voice, off-screen, insistently mocks and berates and insults Elizabeth, while she gives the camera all she's got: a flirtatious smile that won't hold, and a few transparently false stories that she hopes will make her impressive. In each of these little movies, the artifice breaks down. Elizabeth will keep telling a lie, knowing it's not believed, until she sinks down next to a radiator, where she begins picking at a run in her stocking. She is now talking mostly to herself, as a child does, while the man's voice, making fun of her and asserting an employer's prerogatives, reminds her that she's a full-grown sexual commodity.

If you think of pornography in terms

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of power relationships, then this is a stag reel. It is a stripping down—even a kind of murder. And this is the one place where a character in *The Black Dahlia* steps out from the quotation marks and truly comes alive. You may understand, then, why De Palma feels he can trifle with the plot mechanics of fictitious crimes, having re-enacted a real crime right before your eyes.

That's the trick in *The Black Dahlia*—a good enough trick to make up for at least some of the longueurs, improbabilities and self-indulgent gags that trouble the movie's surface. There is, for example, a laboriously established but weirdly unrealized love triangle among Johansson, Hartnett and another police detective, a flashy wiseguy played by Aaron Eckhart. If the plot of *The Black Dahlia* were to be taken seriously, then the home of this threesome would be the film's emotional center. Instead, it's a place where De Palma drops in to visit from time to time. Eckhart, who is a slick actor when he wants to be, is directed to preen, scowl and rage like a bus-and-truck company's Snidely Whiplash, while Hartnett mostly gets to peer at the world through slits so narrow that he seems not to have eyes at all. Granted, Hartnett's character suffers from moral and practical blindness; but it's too much, the way his face (too prettily smooth to be a boxer's) is reduced to a contrast of pillowy lips versus hirsute brow, with nothing holding them apart except for a squint. Bucky's style in the ring is supposedly cold and analytical, but nothing in either the script or the performance hints at such shrewdness.

Hilary Swank would probably take him in one round, but she's stuck being the femme fatale. Scarlett Johansson wears a cloche hat and uses a cigarette holder.

So all right, De Palma's trick maybe doesn't make up for all of the longueurs, improbabilities, etc. Still, his moviemaking instincts are so strong, his habits of thought so incisive, that *The Black Dahlia* at its best is breathtaking.

Here's how he distracts you early in the picture: Hartnett and Eckhart are sitting in a car, staking out the cheap hotel where a thug supposedly holes up. As they wait, a crane shot takes you up the facade of the flophouse and over the roof, so that you see a panorama of the back street and the open land beyond it. There, far below you, a woman is walking by. Suddenly, she begins running along the street, screaming for help. A car is turning the corner, and the driver must certainly hear her, but he just picks up speed, ignoring her attempts to catch up. Though the camera is already in motion, you'd think it would pause on the desperate woman, or even change course and descend to her; but instead, as if acknowledging the heartlessness of the world, it just continues on its course, following the car back out to the main street, where the cops are continuing their stakeout. The pleas will not be answered; the running woman will get no help.

So the corpse of Elizabeth Short, newly discovered, is left in the tall grass behind the hotel. They were never wrong about suffering, the old masters.

I think you will recognize the characters in Kelly Reichardt's *Old Joy*. The slim, glum, eagle-nosed one pieces a living together in Portland, Oregon, listens to Air America and now, on the verge of middle age, is about to become a father. He is so self-involved that when he abruptly takes off for the weekend, leaving his wife to fend for herself at about nine and a half months, he thinks she's the one who should be more considerate: "I'm not going to enjoy myself if you're miserable about it." The buddy with whom he's traveling—thickly bearded, ginger-haired, balding—seems to have no purpose in life beyond getting his mind blown: at meditation retreats, at Big Sur bonfires, at adult-ed courses on topics he doesn't study (but is sure he understands). His shirt is misbuttoned over a pot belly; he shows signs of living in his van.

These are Mark (Daniel London) and Kurt (Will Oldham), whose brief camping trip up to the Cascades provides the sole action of *Old Joy*. Nothing could be simpler; nothing, apart from an early Warhol film, could be less eventful. And yet the immaculately photographed landscape works on you, as it opens up from industrial Portland to the mountains; the closely observed exchanges, which are so rambling and yet leave so much unstated, make the silences between Mark and Kurt echo with regret, longing, hope.

Old Joy is based on a short story by Jonathan Raymond, who wrote the adaptation with Reichardt. Peter Sillen gets credit for the beautifully evocative cinematography. In New York, the picture is playing at Film Forum through October 3. ■

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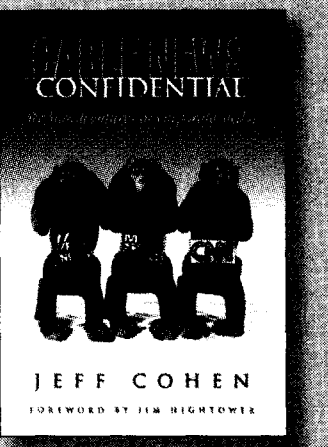

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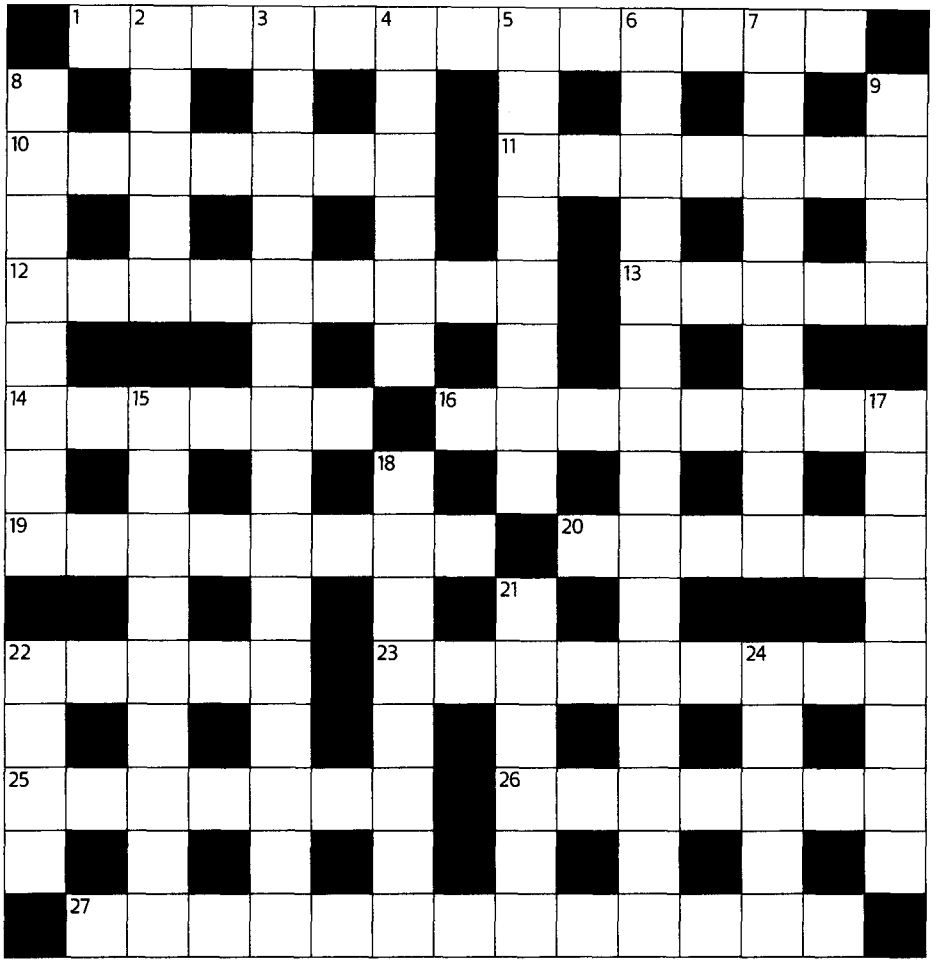

ACROSS

1 Evidently one can't talk about such things, since they can't be explained (but the world body has air-conditioning, while Dracula meets Lincoln around 50). (13)

10 Where to keep things, or just where one buys things—and tries on a variety. (2,5)

11 Figures of speech prove I get surrounded by those things caused by the joking type. (7)

12 Sort of done with knotted ropes when one is formed within the cells of rod-shaped organisms. (9)

13 Share out, possibly, as one takes things in, audibly. (5)

14 Appealing and memorable right away, as what the thrower calls out to your head. (6)

16 What you get just before liftoff, which is essential to your own driving force. (8)

19 What you do with "icicles on your breath," having little taste for the possible result. (4,4)

20 One doesn't behave so downstage, as one capers. (4,2)

22 After the first letter of spaghetti or macaroni. (5)

23 Being no sadist, I still get so-called. (3-6)

25 Sanitary quarter, since you might scrub it this way. (7)

26 Part of the old armor could be a cur, Sis! (7)

27 Drive next to, and haul on a biggest part of a triangle. (4,9)

DOWN

2 Sensed that something is rotten in the state of Denmark, being badly done around the capital of Sweden. (5)

3 What continental-minded Brits have to do, while we mix up one TV station with another? (5,3,7)

4 Al the politician is confused on this—and perhaps in such a state! (6)

5 Saved for a rainy day, and urges things on after getting sent the wrong way. (4,4)

6 They evidently don't get up to fuss about things! (8,7)

7 What Baby Bunting heard when all is blue in the makeup. (9)

8 A Detroit player and a Chicago player should show a little striped one. (5,3)

9 Like a few added words, could provide quite a sting. (4)

15 Worn by part of the blissful couple on a wild tour, on a boat on a foreign water. (9)

17 To bet on the favorite, relatively speaking, open up the misty mist! (8)

18 Everything on the motion of the current is OK, evidently. (4,4)

21 Stannum is able to make it, but it may need an opener. (3,3)

22 Birds do it, and so do bad typists after the hunt. (4)

24 At least a part of the hospital deserves a decoration. (5)

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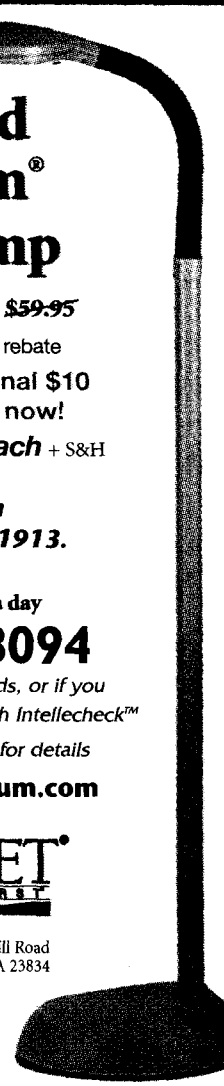

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